

Memories of East German Childhood: Popular Representations of the Contested Past

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## Introduction

Sixteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, any effort to evaluate the successes and failures of German unification invariably reveals two key sources of continued dissatisfaction: first, the speed with which the former GDR disappeared into the Federal Republic's pre-existing political and economic framework, and second, the comprehensiveness of the change. In the atmosphere of euphoria following the fall of the Berlin Wall, despite some Eastern intellectuals' hopes of establishing a "third way," or democratic socialism,<sup>1</sup> what West Germany's CDU leadership considered to be the most politically expedient way of uniting two very different states found support among large segments of the East German population; after all, many East Germans had long since admired aspects of Western life such as a democratic government, a more open civil society, greater freedom of expression, and higher levels of economic prosperity. Once the initial euphoria of the *Wende* faded, however, and former Easterners began to feel the full impact of the extensiveness of change brought about by the dissolution of their state, it became clear that support of unification did not amount to a wholesale acceptance of Western values and ways of life.

As the works discussed in this study will show, on a popular level, fluctuations in East Germans' attitudes towards the West may be read in their varying reception of Western popular and material culture. Throughout the GDR's 40-year existence, Easterners tended to prefer Western consumer products, music, films, and television to their own; thus the *Wende* was marked by many former Easterners' enthusiastic embrace of Western consumer culture and the rapid and nearly complete disappearance of

products from the GDR. Beginning in the late 1990s, however, consumer artifacts from the former East experienced a pop-culture revival: household products, food packages, and toys from the GDR now enjoy a cult status, Berlin bars host parties for nostalgic East German clientele, museums dedicated to the material culture of everyday life in the GDR have been established in Eisenhüttenstadt and Oranienburg, and, thanks to tireless campaigning, the *Ampelmännchen*, the endearing figure in East German traffic lights, has been rescued from replacement with his West German counterpart. Popularly called *Ostalgie*, this nostalgia for the former East is seen by some as a dangerous *Verharmlosung*, or trivialization, of aspects of the GDR such as the Berlin Wall and the *Stasi*. For example, the organization *Help, e.V.*, designed to protect victims of political violence, filed suit against Leander Haußmann for his 1999 film *Sonnenallee*, which supposedly insulted those injured, imprisoned, or killed while trying to escape at the Wall through its lighthearted depiction of adolescent life on a street near the border.<sup>2</sup> For others, however, texts and films like *Sonnenallee* represent an attempt to reassert a uniquely East German identity within the post-unification context based on memories of everyday life in the GDR. By insisting on the validity of personal experiences, these works form a popular counter-narrative to the idea of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*, promulgated by the Western-dominated media in unified Germany<sup>3</sup> and always also at the core of the CDU government's justification of the complete dismantlement of the East German state.

In the years following German unification, scores of studies and surveys have attempted to chart progress towards East-West political, social, and economic integration; what has emerged is the frustrated realization that the scars of 40 years of inner-German

division do not quickly heal. While few former GDR citizens call for the restoration of the repressive Honecker regime, many lament the loss of the securities and privileges granted by the socialist state, particularly in the realms of personal safety, employment, and women's rights. Crucial to understanding post-unification discontent among former East Germans is the fact that the actual processes of unification were Western-driven, tacitly supporting Cold War assumptions about Western superiority.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in the West German media, discussions of the East German past following the *Wende* quickly became dominated by stories of the *Stasi*; sensationalist revelations about the collaboration of such prominent figures as Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller precluded the possibility of more subtle examinations of the nature of life in the GDR.<sup>5</sup>

Nostalgia for the former East must be seen in this context. Rather than directly addressing the *Verharmlosung* critique, my thesis will focus instead on the positive potential of former East Germans' insistence on the value of their own experiences, of their own memories, as a means to develop a more differentiated picture of the East German past. I begin my study of memories of East German childhood in contemporary literature and film with a work that falls outside of the recent pop culture trends discussed above, Monika Maron's 1991 novel *Stille Zeile Sechs*. *Stille Zeile Sechs* points to a longer tradition of referring to childhood memory as a means of contesting dominant narratives of history, as the protagonist Rosalind Polkowski turns to her own experiences in order to denounce the Stalinist past of the SED leadership. Furthermore, Rosalind's creation of an alternate, idyllic space of peace, imagination, and play in order to form her own sense of identity, to formulate her own ideas for a better society, resonates with the other works under discussion, in which the notion of an ideal space and memories of the

personal past collapse to form an image of a lost childhood paradise, where longing for the past may transform into hopes for the future. Wolfgang Becker's 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!* and Jana Hensel's 2002 text *Zonenkinder* both take the upheavals of the *Wende* as their point of departure. *Good Bye, Lenin!* addresses the problem of loss in the face of irreversible change; relating the disappearance of East German material culture to the displacement of East German citizens in post-unification society, *Good Bye Lenin!* suggests that remnants of East German popular and material culture provide a mnemonic link to the personal past that facilitates reflection on the passage of time, as well as on the inevitability of death. In my discussion of Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, I will reveal the limitations of narrating the East German past in the language of present, Western popular culture; above all, I will show that in attempting to speak for a generation, Hensel closes out the experiences of others, whose need for recognition and representation forms the basis of contemporary interest in uniquely East German experiences. In contrast to *Zonenkinder*, Leander Haußmann's 1999 film *Sonnenallee* contributes to current processes of former East Germans' identity formation by appealing to the past in terms of a youth subculture centered on popular music. Overlapping present, post-unification conflicts with the protagonist Micha's memories of his East German adolescence, *Sonnenallee* creates a more nuanced picture of life in the former East, emphasizing Easterners' cultural agency by establishing a point of continuity between present memory and past experience through the depiction of countercultural trends in the GDR.

As the above reference to *Sonnenallee* indicates, I use the term "childhood" in this study to encompass adolescence as well. Mine is a *qualitative* understanding of childhood, based on these works' equation of childhood and the private sphere, which in

turn is characterized by the internal spaces of the home, relationships between family and friends, and the slow pace of everyday life, a world bound to, yet experientially distinct from both the political reality of public life as well as the monumental sweep of history. In each of the texts or films under discussion, the encounter with the larger, public, political sphere instigates the beginning of the end of childhood, experienced as a disruptive, but necessary, stage in the process of maturation: for Rosalind in *Stille Zeile Sechs*, this moment comes when she fights with her father about questions of historical guilt; for Alex in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, when his father defects to the West; for Micha in *Sonnenallee*, both when his friend Wuschel is nearly killed at the Berlin Wall and when Micha breaks with his best friend Mario because Mario is forced to collaborate with the *Stasi* in order to get a job; and lastly, for Jana Hensel in *Zonenkinder*, the Monday demonstrations in her native Leipzig in 1989 constitute what she calls the last days of her childhood. These works do not lament the end of childhood as such; rather, the step into the responsibilities of adulthood, into the forward flow of historical time, is seen as a positive movement into the future. Similarly, the texts and films under discussion do not contest the basic fact of German unification, but rather explore ways to overcome the inequalities felt by many East Germans by articulating the specific nature of their experiences. What is important is not the restoration of lost East German childhood, but rather its retention both in personal memory and in representations of the East German past.

In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Zonenkinder*, and *Sonnenallee*, memories of childhood, of the collective experiences of everyday life, are often articulated in the shared language of popular and material culture; the objects of the home, the television shows watched with

family, the music shared with friends all become intimately bound to the emotional spaces in which they were encountered. In the rush towards German unification and the push to assimilate into Western ways of life, memories of the personal past threatened to disappear along with the popular and material culture with which they were associated. Thus my thesis will focus on the *preservation* of such memories as well as their representation: corresponding to the physical and virtual museums to everyday life in the GDR that have sprung up within the past decade, I will trace the metaphors of museums that run throughout these texts and films as they relate to the attempt to preserve elements of the GDR past outside the dominant narrative of repression, coercion, and privation. In a sociological examination of nostalgia, Fred Davis comments that “nostalgia tells us more about present moods than about past realities;”<sup>6</sup> in the pages that follow, in addition to presenting memories of the East German past in the context of the post-unification present, I will explore how in relying on inherently unreliable personal memory, the works in question also call attention to the constructed nature of any story of the past, thereby emphasizing the need for the representation of multiple aspects of East German life. Finally, and most importantly, I hope to show that in the discourse on the former GDR, the shift in focus away from the SED leadership’s mechanisms of repression and towards the experiences of everyday life, articulated in terms of the private spaces of personal childhood, acknowledges East Germans’ cultural agency during the GDR as well as in unified Germany.



## Chapter One

### Metaphors and Memories of Childhood in Monika Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs*

In Monika Maron's novel *Stille Zeile Sechs*, the protagonist Rosalind Polkowski refers to childhood memory in order to oppose former party functionary Herbert Beerenbaum's distorted and self-serving version of the East German past. Published in 1991 and set in the 1980s, Maron's novel critiques the former GDR after its demise, but before the German public felt the full impact of unification. Furthermore, unlike the authors and filmmakers whose works I examine in the rest of this study, Maron experienced life in the GDR both as a child and as an adult; born in 1941, her lifetime encompasses the forty years of the GDR's existence. She therefore provides a very different portrait of the former East than will appear in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Zonenkinder*, or *Sonnenallee*; nevertheless, the protagonist's memories of childhood in *Stille Zeile Sechs* similarly serve to critique discourses of both the present and the past. *Stille Zeile Sechs* presents the encounter between citizen and state in the GDR as a parent/child relationship: as a woman trapped in a position of childish subordination by the regime's patriarchal power structures, Rosalind subverts this constellation by turning to her own childhood memories, characterized by an antagonistic relationship with her communist, authoritarian father, in order to confront the SED leadership's Stalinist past, as well as to assert the validity of her own experiences. By comparing her childhood conflict with her father, the representative of familial authority, with her present-day conflict with

Beerenbaum, the representative of state authority, Rosalind also articulates her desires for a better society, imagining an alternate, female-centered idyll based on love, trust, and community as opposed to the paranoia and antagonism she experiences both in East German society and in her remembered childhood home. In *Stille Zeile Sechs*, childhood memory serves as an oppositional force; this chapter will examine how Maron employs both metaphors and memories of childhood to criticize contemporary power structures in the GDR, challenge the leadership's version of the East German past, and finally to imagine a better future. At the end of my analysis, I will also indicate how despite the apparent disparities between Maron's novel and the works examined in the rest of this study, the thematic treatment of childhood memory in *Stille Zeile Sechs* nevertheless resonates with later depictions of the East German childhood past.

Arrested in a perpetual state of childish powerlessness by the patriarchal authority of the GDR's aging leaders, Rosalind Polkowski's demand that the party leadership take responsibility for the crimes it perpetrated on East German citizens manifests itself as a conflict between father and daughter. The basic plot of Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs* revolves around Rosalind's decision to transcribe the memoirs of Professor Herbert Beerenbaum, a former high-ranking party functionary whose biography is representative of the lives of powerful East German political figures such as Walter Ulbricht, Wilhelm Pieck, and Maron's stepfather Karl Maron: proletarian upbringing, early membership in the communist party, *Volksabschluss*, emigration during the Third Reich or internment in a concentration camp, residence in Moscow's Hotel Lux, and finally an important position in the SED.<sup>7</sup> As Beerenbaum serves as a symbol of state authority in public life, his resemblance to Rosalind's father indicates that the GDR's patriarchal political

structures carried over into private life as well. Rosalind repeatedly compares Beerenbaum's appearance, clothes, house, language, and ideas to those of her father, a school director and convinced communist who ruled her home with an iron hand: "Mein Vater herrschte über meine Schule, und er herrschte zu Hause. Sogar wann ich morgens ins Bad durfte, bestimmte er. Gegen ihn konnte keine Klage geführt werden; niemand, der ihm widersprach."<sup>8</sup> The similarity between public and private authority, initially united in the figure of her father, later transferred to the real political influence of Herbert Beerenbaum, means that Rosalind remains unwillingly subordinate to male power beyond the chronological confines of childhood. Indeed, Rosalind describes how an immature child lives right beneath the surface of her adult self, waiting to be drawn out by what she considers the infuriating behavior of old men like Beerenbaum and her father: for example, illustrating the "unbezähmbare Haßgefühle" old men's whining voices unleash in her, she refers to an incident on the tram in which she gives into an insuppressible, physical urge to childishly imitate a complaining old man: "Und, wie die fremde Wut in mich eingedrungen war, drängte sie nun als die fremde quengelige Stimme des Mannes aus mir hinaus. Hab's doch gleich gewußt, hab's doch gleich gewußt, wiederholte ich papageienhaft seinen letzten Satz..."<sup>9</sup> For Rosalind, the East German state, personified by strict, humorless, irritating old men, is inseparable from her father; as a citizen, she therefore remains trapped in a state of eternal childhood.

This constellation of the state as a controlling parent and the citizen as a dependant child corresponds to actual structures of power within the GDR. Pointing to the theoretical basis of Marxism-Leninism, and the idea that the vanguard party ought to act in the "true," if not expressed, interests of the masses who were suffering from "false

consciousness,” Mary Fulbrook describes the SED’s strategies of power in terms of both paternalism and paranoia. Though in many ways the party looked after the needs of its people, as shown by former East Germans’ laments over the loss of the GDR’s social safety net in unified Germany, the SED’s paranoid fear of Western influence and popular discontent ultimately created a climate of coercion and repression.<sup>10</sup> Fulbrook captures both the repressive and welfare aspects of SED rule with an extended metaphor of a parent/child relationship:

The image is perhaps one of a totally authoritarian parent, who is prepared to engage in the pretense of consulting the child but who will from the outset refuse to value the child’s opinions- for the omniscient and omnipotent parent always, in principle, knows better. The authoritarian parent will of course seek to act in the best interests of an immature child who does not really understand, and who should to some extent be protected from full knowledge of the facts so as not to get unduly upset about things which it is too immature to comprehend. The child will be bought sweets and toys on occasion, be given outings and treats- but also be smacked and sent to bed if behavior starts to get out of control.<sup>11</sup>

As the leadership continued to age, the patronizing undertones of this “paternalism,” which developed out of experiences of poverty, war, and the constant struggle for survival, led to bitter resentment as generations of people socialized under radically different conditions came into maturity without coming into power. In Maron’s *Stille Zeile Sechs*, the tensions between Rosalind and Beerenbaum paint the inequalities of East German structures of power as a continuous and irresolvable parent/child conflict.

Rosalind feels her lack of political agency ever more acutely as she passively transcribes what becomes Beerenbaum’s version of history. As he celebrates what he considers his generation’s monumental achievements towards fulfilling the dreams of communism, she longs to confront him with the countless victims of his authoritarian rule. Like the real-life leaders of the SED, Beerenbaum uses his legitimately admirable

resistance to Hitler to justify building a state that put the quest for a utopian communist future above the immediate needs and rights of its citizens. Alan Nothnagle describes the leadership's inflated use of this past as "the myth of the GDR's "antifascist legacy"": "At first merely the strongest argument among others, the role of this legacy grew in importance until by 1989 antifascism became, in fact, the only argument for the continued existence of an SED-run GDR. It alone had the power to arouse fanaticism and justify the killing of one's fellow citizens upon command."<sup>12</sup> Beerenbaum masks the crimes of the East German dictatorship behind the euphemisms of party rhetoric; for example, referring to the Berlin Wall as the "Antifaschistischer Schutzwall," he justifies its construction as follows: "Damals, sagte Beerenbaum, vor dem historischen August 61, habe er, wenn er morgens beim Betreten der Universität die Linden hinunterblickte, oft die Vision gehabt, Ströme des Lebensaftes der jungen Republik, rot und pulsierend, durch das Brandenburger Tor geradewegs in den gierigen Körper des Feindes fließen zu sehen."<sup>13</sup> Having decided at the novel's outset "daß es eine Schande ist, für Geld zu denken,"<sup>14</sup> Rosalind initially agrees to work for Beerenbaum on the condition that only her transcription skills, rather than her mental energies, would be put to use; however, confronted with the distortions of Beerenbaum's view of the past and his blatant disregard for the regime's many victims, her refusal to comment on or critique the content of his memoirs begins to weigh on her conscience. She remarks:

Je länger ich für Beerenbaum arbeitete, um so stärker wurde mein Gefühl, etwas Verbotenes zu tun. Während ich widerspruchslos hinschrieb, was Beerenbaum diktierte, fragte ich mich immer öfter, ob ich mich nicht zum Mittäter macht, ob ich nicht sein Komplize wurde, indem ich ihm half, das eigene Denkmal in Lettern zu gießen.<sup>15</sup>

Initially, Rosalind's refusal to think for money serves as a form of opposition through passivity; after she quits her job as a historian, not working, like not responding to Beerenbaum, is her way of stepping out of the institutionalized structures and the ideological rhetoric of patriarchal society. Yet as the quote above indicates, though she refuses to respond to Beerenbaum's narrative for as long as possible, fearing that he intends to provoke her to express an opinion, to engage in a dialogue, or, more likely, an argument, Rosalind discovers that even if she remains silent, her silence connotes agreement, and, indirectly, guilt. Throughout the novel, Rosalind is caught between a desire to act and this attempt at resistant passivity; she is also plagued with questions of guilt associated with both action and inaction: for instance, her preoccupation with Ernst Toller's question linking action and guilt forms one of the central themes of the novel: "Muß der Handelnde schuldig werden, immer und immer? Oder, wenn er nicht schuldig werden will, untergehen?"<sup>16</sup> Eventually, Rosalind discovers that she must act, though perhaps with fatal consequences as Beerenbaum suffers a heart attack during her final storm of verbal abuse, in order to hold him responsible for actions that he would excuse through reference to his antifascist past.<sup>17</sup>

When the writer Victor Sensmann comes to visit Beerenbaum, Rosalind finally protests Beerenbaum's description of the past as her frustration at being treated like a naïve child in relation to the all-powerful state comes to a head. In response to his comments on the Berlin Wall quoted above, Rosalind retorts: "Da haben Sie das Blut lieber selbst zum Fließen gebracht und eine Mauer gebaut, an der Sie den Leuten die nötigen Öffnungen in die Körper schießen konnten..."<sup>18</sup> Sensmann and Beerenbaum respond with united condescension: "Und Sensmann sagte zu Beerenbaum in einem Ton,

der klang, als verständigen sich vernünftige Erwachsene hinter dem Rücken eines uneinsichtigen Kindes: Ich glaube auch, daß es eine notwendige Entscheidung war.”<sup>19</sup>

Following Rosalind’s outburst, she relates in detail her conflict with her father, emphasizing the parallel between the public repressions of the historical past and the private repressions of the personal past as well as indicating the extent to which Rosalind’s position as a child did not change once she reached adulthood. For instance, when thirteen-year-old Rosalind and her classmates flee her school’s May Day parade through a gap in the bushes, she describes her later confrontation with her parents as follows:

So geriet ich in das Dreieck zwischen van Goghs Sonnenblumen, meinem Vater und meiner Mutter. Alle starrten mich an, die einen gleichmütig, mein Vater haßerfüllt, meine Mutter verzweifelt. Alle waren sich einig... die Sonnenblumen hingen an der Wand und gehörten dazu. Eine eiserne Einigkeit, die ich durch etwas, das ich nicht verstand, heraufbeschworen hatte und der ich ratlos und schreiend gegenüberstand.<sup>20</sup>

As an adult, when she screams at Sensmann and Beerenbaum, in a living room that very closely resembles her parents’, she finds herself trapped in a similarly confrontational triangle: “Diese Einigkeit war es, die ich zwischen Sensmann und Beerenbaum wiedererkannte: das strickte Einhalten der aus Interessen erwachsenen Spielregeln... Und wieder stand ich plötzlich zwischen Schrankwand und Polstermöbeln und schrie.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, as Maron’s detailed descriptions of furniture and household decorations in these parallel scenes suggest, her critique of both her father and Beerenbaum is also a critique of their petit-bourgeois taste. In *Stille Zeile Sechs*, as the negative metaphors of childhood, representing the citizen’s persistent powerlessness and subjugation, reach their apex, Rosalind turns increasingly to her own memories of childhood as a basis for

contradiction and opposition to Beerenbaum's representation of the crimes of the East German past.

Throughout *Stille Zeile Sechs*, Rosalind complains that her life has been stolen from her, overshadowed by the biographies of the SED leadership, and used in the push to build their version of socialism. At one point she asks Beerenbaum "ob er wirklich glaube, daß Generationen von Menschen geboren werden, damit Kommunisten ihre Ideale an ihnen erproben dürfen."<sup>22</sup> She suggests that the older generation of SED leaders has used its history of antifascist resistance to render GDR citizens' justified discontent with state repression trivial, as well as minimize its members' accommodation and support of Stalinism. For instance, when Rosalind reproaches Beerenbaum, and by implication his generation, for following Stalin while in exile at Moscow's infamous Hotel Lux as his less fortunate friends and comrades were murdered or sent to Soviet labor camps, Beerenbaum counters with the fact that the Nazis sent his wife Grete to the concentration camp Ravensbrück. Rosalind comments: "Sie hatten immer recht, dachte ich, was ich auch sage, alles Unglück gehört schon ihnen, den glücklichen Besitzern von Biografien. Kaum mach ich das Maul auf, um meine einzuklagen, stoßen sie mir einen Brocken wie Ravensbrück oder Buchenwald zwischen die Zähne. Friß oder stirb."<sup>23</sup> Beerenbaum knows that Rosalind will not be able to challenge his and his wife's persecution during the Third Reich; he knows that she will not be able to repeat her question about the Hotel Lux, as she says, "...weil ich in meinem Leben nichts vorzuweisen hatte, was mich zu dieser Frage berechtigte."<sup>24</sup> As he tells her of Grete's imprisonment in Ravensbrück, he leaves the room shouting, "[u]nd das liegt nicht in Sibirien."<sup>25</sup> Rosalind defiantly refuses to allow Beerenbaum to avoid implication for one



crime by reminding her that he is a victim of another, as she writes: “Grete wurde im Herbst 39 verhaftet. Sie kam in das Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück. Sibirien liegt bei Ravensbrück.”<sup>26</sup> In her arguments with her father as an adolescent, the young Rosalind contests the equation of victimhood and innocence; after she asks her father why the working class failed to prevent the rise of National Socialism, he retorts: “Willst du sagen, nicht der Täter, sondern das Opfer ist schuldig” to which she responds: “Wenn das Opfer sich nicht wehrt, hat es auch Schuld.”<sup>27</sup> As an adult, Rosalind refines this critique to suggest not, as in her earlier question, that Beerenbaum’s generation ought to have been able to prevent the rise of National Socialism, but rather that his being a victim of Nazi persecution does not absolve him of his Stalinist past. For instance, as she questions him about the disappearance of his fellow communists while at the Hotel Lux, Beerenbaum’s nose starts bleeding; Rosalind is disgusted by what she reads as Beerenbaum’s attempt to avoid her charge of his complicity in Stalinist persecution: “Nicht Beerenbaums Blut... widerte mich an, sondern daß er mir statt einer Antwort sein altes, tablettenverseuchtes, gegen Thrombose künstlich verdünntes Blut anbot, daß er versuchte, sich durch diesen miesen Trick in ein Opfer zu verwandeln und mir das Fragen zu verbieten.”<sup>28</sup> Rosalind’s search for her own biography becomes a search for an experiential basis from which she may challenge what she calls the “legend” of Beerenbaum’s life.<sup>29</sup> As Brigitte Rossbacher comments, “Seeking her own biography, Rosalind here stages more than a purely imaginary struggle to usurp the state’s status. She verbally assaults Beerenbaum with the apparent contradictions of his story and GDR history... Re-visioning the story of Beerenbaum’s generation, Rosalind begins to write her own story and thereby to legitimate an alternate view of the past and the present.”<sup>30</sup>

In an attempt to lend her own experiences meaning, to build a foundation from which she may critique the injustices of state socialism, Rosalind establishes a counter-narrative to Beerenbaum's interpretation of the East German past by relating incidents from her own childhood. For instance, she tells a story about how as a ten-year-old child, she learned to make her father's favorite dessert, lemon cream, in order to win his love and approval. Instead of thanking her for her efforts, he simply ate and ate, as Rosalind says: "Für meinen Vater schien es normal zu sein, daß seine Lieblingsnachspeise in ausreichender Menge auf dem Tisch stand, schuldig war er dafür keinem etwas. Er fraß und fraß. Mich schickten sie früh ins Bett."<sup>31</sup> Rosalind's memories of her childhood interactions with her father are characterized by a longing for love, recognition, and familial closeness on her side, and cruel indifference on his. She describes how he only bothered to speak to her "wenn es sich um meine politische Erziehung handelte,"<sup>32</sup> and how, even then, their conversations seldom lasted more than twenty minutes. As a thirteen-year-old, Rosalind's dissidence was born not out of deeply-held political convictions, but rather out of her attempts to gain her father's attention through provocative questions. Yet since he saw the world only in terms of class struggle, or in terms of the battle between fascism and communism, he read adolescent rebellion as political subversion and, as a result, he began to consider his daughter to be the enemy within his own home:

Meine Eltern konnten sich den verheerenden Wandel meiner politischen Ansichten nicht anders erklären, als daß ich feindlichen Einflüssen in meiner nächsten Umgebung ausgesetzt war. Der Verdacht fiel auf meine Klasse, und mein Vater, der Direktor, ergriff Maßnahmen, um der ideologischen Unterwanderung der 7b entgegenzutreten.<sup>33</sup>

As an adult, the motivation for Rosalind's dissidence is, of course, political, motivated by the Stalinist past; yet based on these early experiences, to her communism will always imply a willingness to sacrifice familial love, compassion, and understanding for the sake of an idea. Her father's notion that he must oppose "der ideologischen Unterwandering der 7b" is not only ridiculous, but cruel as well, since he forever destroyed the hope of building a relationship based on love and trust by making his own child his political antagonist. The hostility and distrust with which Rosalind's father treats her points to the inhumanity underlying the SED leadership's methods of social control, as Fulbrook describes:

If individuals dared to speak out against the system- if they dared to constitute spokes in the works, blocking inexorable progress towards ultimate goals- their value as human beings was to be utterly disregarded. There was, at the heart of the system... an essential disregard for human worth, for the rights of people to hold different views. In its more malign modes, the communist regime utterly despised the human beings over whom the SED ruled: the apparatus of repression was prepared to destroy not just careers, but trusting human relationships and whole lives, in its quest for a mirage in the future.<sup>34</sup>

Setting her accusatory critiques of Beerenbaum beside her troubled relationship with her father, Rosalind reveals that the blind pursuit of communism, even when based on a legitimate antifascist past, generated a climate of distrust that subjugated citizens in a position of eternal childhood. For Rosalind, a communist will always be "jemand, der sich bei einem Kind, das ihm eine große Schüssel Zitronencreme schenkt, nicht bedankt, weil er gerade mit der Weltrevolution beschäftigt ist."<sup>35</sup> Rosalind's childhood memories thus mirror on an individual scale, in private life, the instrumental rationality she feels is inherent in the communist ideology imposed on East German society.

In addition to referring to her childhood in order to contradict Beerenbaum's views of East German history, Rosalind also seeks to recapture the stolen or lost past by

creating a space where she can experience the childhood paradise she feels she was denied. In the beginning of the novel Rosalind remarks: “Zu den großen unerfüllten Wünschen meiner Kindheit gehörte ein Klavier, vor allem aber die Fähigkeit, darauf zu spielen.”<sup>36</sup> In her neighbor Thekla Fleischer, Rosalind finds not only a piano teacher but also a female-centered oasis, as opposed to the patriarchal structures of both her childhood home and public life in the GDR, where she may freely fulfill her childhood dreams. As she visits Thekla for the first time, she contrasts her father’s absolute control over the family household with the warmth of her neighbor’s apartment, together with Thekla’s happy memories of her own mother: “Hier, bei Ihnen, sagte ich mit einem Blick, der die Lampe, das Sofa, die übrigen Möbel einkreiste und auf dem Klavier verharrte, hätte er nichts zu sagen gehabt. Das hätte Mami gar nicht erlaubt, sagte sie.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout the novel, Rosalind explores an alternative relationship to the world separate from the rationalist expectations of constant progress and social utility and based instead on an intuitive identification with nature and in tasks focused on play rather than concrete production.<sup>38</sup> For instance, after another boring day at the Barabas research institute, where she works as a historian (a job she later quits), she longs for the freedom she sees in the lives of the cats that live near her apartment building. Furthermore, when she hears on the radio that the recitatives of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* cannot be translated into German, she decides to try it herself, though she doesn’t speak Italian or even like opera. She imagines that either success as an amateur or failure together with a group of experts would be equally satisfying, as she says: “Der Erfolg wie der Mißerfolg erschienen mir gleichermaßen verlockend, zumal meine Interesse ausschließlich spielerischer Natur war, unverdorben durch professionellen Ehrgeiz oder durch Zwang.”<sup>39</sup> Yet just as her father

and Beerenbaum impose restrictions on her world as described above, so too would her ex-boyfriend Bruno spoil her fun in translating *Don Giovanni* by emphasizing the almost certain lack of a practical outcome in contrast to Rosalind's enjoyment of the attempt. Thus she may only discover the potential freedom of self-expression and the play of imagination that she missed in her childhood within the female-centered spaces surrounding her neighbor Thekla. In Thekla's symbolic wedding to her married lover Herr Solow, Rosalind's imaginative relationship to nature and her need for play combine in romantic union of love and death as Thekla is "married" in a cemetery chapel. When it begins to rain, Rosalind describes: "Spitzer Eisregen fiel auf uns nieder, und wir hatten Mühe, über die glatten Straßen wieder zu unserem Haus zu kommen. In Theklas grauem Haar hingen unzählige Eiskristalle, und Herr Solow sagte... daß das Gewitter ein Hochzeitsgeschenk des Himmels sei, tausend Edelsteine für Thekla."<sup>40</sup> The emphasis on nature, imagination, love, and community in Rosalind's alternate ideal space recalls the revival of German romanticism in East German literature in the 1970s, particularly in the work of Christa Wolf. In the GDR, romantic attitudes provided a contrast, critique, and supplement to socialism's focus on industrial progress and its elevation of reason as a prerequisite for productive thought or insight; as Sigrun Leonhard notes in relation to Heiner Carow's film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, which I discuss in the chapter on Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee*, this shift towards romantic values showed that "reason is not the ultimate authority; what motivates human beings is the totality of their desires, fears, and thoughts, which can neither be predicted or prescribed."<sup>41</sup> Separate from the restrictive and repressive patriarchal world order she experiences in connection with the state as well as with her personal childhood, Rosalind's female-centered paradise

approaches life with a fundamentally different set of values, in a world characterized by love, trust, and community rather than politically-driven antagonism. On Thekla's wedding day, she remarks: "Es war ein Tag wie aus einem anderen Leben. Ich dachte nicht eine Minute an Beerenbaum."<sup>42</sup>

Yet Rosalind's desire to build her own biography and to imagine a different, better society based on her lost childhood dreams may not be fully realized in the present; as long as Beerenbaum continues to live, the irreconcilable clash between their generations, between parent and child, will preclude any of Rosalind's attempts at identity formation:

In dieser Minute begriff ich, daß alles von Beerenbaums Tod abhing, von seinem und dem seiner Generation. Erst wenn ihr Werk niemandem mehr heilig war, wenn nur noch seine Brauchbarkeit entscheiden würde über seinen Bestand oder Untergang, würde ich herausfinden, was ich im Leben gern getan hätte. Und dann würde es zu spät sein.<sup>43</sup>

Though Beerenbaum has been ill throughout the novel, he suffers the heart attack that finally kills him during Rosalind's last series of bitterly relentless accusations. Rather than create a sharp, satisfying break between the troubled past and a bright future, however, Beerenbaum's death is anticlimactic: "Beerenbaum ist tot, begraben. Und alles ist wie vorher. Übermorgen ist der Tag nach Beerenbaums Tod. Wann ist übermorgen? Morgen, vorgestern, übermorgen? Ist übermorgen schon gewesen, und ich habe es nicht bemerkt?"<sup>44</sup> At the end of *Stille Zeile Sechs*, Rosalind tells a story about two brothers who, at their father's behest, dig up their entire vineyard in search of treasure, and who, once they find neither gold nor precious gems, then complain about the senselessness of the task; however: "Im nächsten Sommer aber, die Brüder hatten sich mit der Enttäuschung abgefunden, hing der prophezeite Schatz als überreiche Ernte an den

Weinstöcken.”<sup>45</sup> As Carl Pietzcker suggests, just as Rosalind “digs up” her childhood past in hopes of calling the leadership to justice and of gaining the rewards of freedom, so too must she wait for a delayed, but attainable, “übermorgen” in the form of a better future.<sup>46</sup>

Thus Rosalind’s evocations of the childhood world, both as the remembered past and as the alternate childhood idyll, seek not only to reclaim her personal biography as a critique of the historical past, but ultimately point to the future as well. The following chapters will reveal how Maron’s use of metaphors and memories of childhood in *Stille Zeile Sechs* reappear in the very different context of popular representations of East German childhood in contemporary literature and film. As Birgit Konze notes, although Rosalind’s reproach that Beerenbaum’s generation has “stolen” her biography parallels Easterners’ discontents in post-unification Germany, Maron herself has no surplus of sympathy for the former GDR:

Rosalinds Vater versagt in der Rolle als Vater; stärker noch, Rosalind wird bewusst, dass nicht nur ihr eigener Vater im Grunde als Mensch versagt hat, sondern, mit ganz wenigen Ausnahmen, seine ganze Generation, dass die Elterngeneration mit ihrem unbedingten Glauben an den Kommunismus, den Kindern die Identitätsfindung verwehrt hat, die Biographie geraubt hat. Den Vorwurf, den heute viele Menschen aus Ostdeutschland den Westdeutschen machen, mit der Vereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten einfach ausgewischt zu haben, machen Marons Protagonistinnen gerade den Ostdeutschen.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Maron’s vitriolic essay “Zonophobie,”<sup>48</sup> in which she chronicles what she considers to be the infuriating habits of former citizens of the GDR, does not strive for the nuanced understanding of East Germans’ difficulties in the transition to the post-unification present that the rest of this study will describe. Nevertheless, the notion that memories of personal childhood help to regain a lost past, aiding those in positions of political subordination to contradict or critique dominant narratives of history, is relevant

both in the GDR and for former Easterners in unified Germany. Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs* also shows that imagining spaces of childhood paradise, whether these overlap with the remembered childhood past or are formed in adulthood, helps to identify hopes for better present and future societies. For the purposes of my study, Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs* reveals a larger tradition of referring to personal experiences of East German childhood, of asserting the importance of individual biographies, as means of actively relating to discourses of the past that in turn shape both the present and the future.



## Chapter Two

### Time, Space, and the Problem of Loss in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*

In Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the protagonist Alex Kerner's nostalgia for his lost East German childhood translates more abstractly into a longing for utopia: throughout the film, Alex dreams of a place of peace and internal harmony, far away from the pressures and pain of everyday reality, where the fevered forward rush of time has gently slowed. Alex first develops these utopian fantasies in reaction to familial trauma, paying determined attention to the 1978 television broadcast of the East German astronaut Sigmund Jähn's flight into space while the *Stasi* questions his mother about his father's flight to the West. For Alex, longing for the impossible distance and peaceful silence of outer space becomes a means of transcending painful reality. Conversely, his mother Christiane successfully pushes unpleasant reminders of her husband out of family interactions by enthusiastically embracing life in the GDR, as the adult Alex ironically reports in voice-over: "Meine Mutter heiratete das sozialistisches Vaterland." After suffering a heart attack in October 1989, Christiane falls into a coma for eight months; as she awakens, Alex fears that if she learns of the rapid dissolution of her beloved GDR following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the shock will bring on a second heart attack, which her doctors warned could kill her. As Alex is faced with the irrecoverable loss of both his mother and the state with which she so closely identified, the memory of his childhood and the disappearing GDR begin to take on similar qualities to his fantasies of outer

space. Necessarily inaccessible, the temporal distance of his East German childhood seems to offer Alex a much-needed resting place away from an accelerated experience of time that would sever him too quickly from his mother and his personal past. Alex's longing for the imagined utopias of space, childhood, and the lost GDR all share a desire for a separate, slower flow of time; as Svetlana Boym says of nostalgia: "At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time- the time of our childhood, the slower rhythm of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress."<sup>49</sup> Though Alex's early dreams of space are fundamentally escapist, his later shift into a decelerated experience of time offers a potentially positive critique of the disorienting speed of German unification, together with the immediate and comprehensive disposal of all things East German, thereby emphasizing the human need for time to mourn and reflect in the face of irreversible change.

My discussion of Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* will focus on the film's depiction of the passage of time as it relates to Alex's understanding of loss. Rather than concentrating on the child, *Good Bye, Lenin!* presents the adult's relationship to childhood memory through Alex's desperate attempts to retain a link to his personal past in a rapidly changing world. Hoping to prolong Christiane's life, Alex conceals the collapse of the East German state by reconstructing his mother's bedroom with the outmoded GDR furnishings he and his older sister Ariane threw out months before. Like Rosalind's effort to build an alternate family around her benevolent neighbor in Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs*, in addition to protecting his mother, Alex strives to create the childhood paradise he never had. Moreover, Alex's dreams of utopia resist both

communism and capitalism's large-scale demands of constant progress; disappointed by the worker's as well as the consumer's paradise, Alex turns his utopian longing inward, seeking refuge in the easy predictability of everyday life and in the domestic spaces of personal childhood.<sup>50</sup> Referring to contemporary Western culture's increasing interest in subjective understandings of the past, Andreas Huyssen suggests that this "memory boom... is a potentially healthy sign of contestation" in our fast-paced world, "recover[ing] a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks" as well as expressing "the basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality."<sup>51</sup> Yet although Alex's small act of preservation has positive, even subversive, potential in the context of German unification and the resulting dismantlement of East German social and political structures, he risks eternally postponing a mode of contemplation that would lead to acceptance of his mother's death, wrapping himself instead in the comfort of a timeless present. Thus this chapter will trace Alex's shifting relationship to temporality, and by association to the inevitability of death, from legitimate resistance to the speed of unification and the undifferentiated disavowal of all aspects of East German life, to a level of regressive nostalgia that would stop the forward flow of time altogether, and finally to mourning and the acceptance of loss. By examining Alex's interaction with the East German past through its popular and material culture in particular, I hope to show how his connection to personal childhood moves from a utopian longing for a temporal distance that avoids reflection, to an alternate, slower, but nevertheless future-oriented experience of time that ultimately facilitates reflection.

After Alex's father leaves for the West, mother and children work to live a happy life in the East. As Alex ages, however, his cheerful pride in his mother's small attempts to improve life in the GDR fades to cynical disillusionment. In a cinematically seamless transition from childhood to adulthood, Becker calls sharp attention to the discontinuity of Alex's experience of his state, as the camera pans from young Alex's miniature rocket shooting into the bright blue sky, down to adult Alex, nineteen or twenty years old, drinking on a bench on the afternoon of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR. That night, as Christiane makes her way to an official ceremony to receive an award for her dedicated service, Alex attends a protest demanding liberalization; Christiane's heart attack comes when she witnesses police brutally beating her son together with a crowd of demonstrators. While his mother lies in a coma, Alex's voice-over narration emphasizes how her world disappears "overnight," as he describes how she sleeps through Honecker's resignation, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and her son's first trip into West Berlin. Christiane's children adapt quickly to Western life: for example, when Alex begins his new job selling satellite dishes, fast-motion film comically conveys his first experiences in the accelerated pace of a capitalist economy, as his and his Western partner Denis's van races around a corner. Though Alex does not embrace Western culture with his sister Ariane's uncritical exuberance, as she immediately abandons her studies to work at Burger King, he nevertheless looks to Germany's future with hopeful anticipation, as he says: "Wir hatten das Gefühl, im Mittelpunkt der Welt zu stehen... Die Zukunft liegt ungewiss auf unseren Händen- ungewiss und verheißungsvoll." Only when his mother awakens does he discover what the loss of the GDR as a political entity means on a personal level. Confronted with the prospect of immediate loss, he finds that the

exhilarating uncertainty and speed of change in a society of turbulent transition have also deprived him of the familiar structures and rhythm of life he needs to accept his mother's death.

Thus when Alex decides that the best way to protect his mother from a potentially fatal shock is to create what the film's advertisements called "the last seventy-nine square meters of the GDR," he does so not out of affection for the state, but out of affection for his mother. The sudden and nearly complete loss of East German cultural signposts becomes threatening once Alex associates his mother's survival, or at least the postponement of her death, with his ability to preserve the material culture of the GDR. Following German unification, which simply extended West Germany's political and economic framework further east, any and all aspects of life in the former GDR were thought to be obsolete, inferior, or the result of mass delusion, as Leonie Naughton notes: "No matter what their value, a plethora of activities and aspects of GDR life, ranging from banal elements of schooling and family life to mass communications and culture, were denounced as contaminated by the ideology of a corrupt and nefarious dictatorship."<sup>52</sup> In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, Becker relates the indiscriminate disposal of East German goods with former Easterners' sense of displacement in newly unified Germany. Though Alex and Ariane have found both jobs under capitalism and friends among West Germans, the older generation, represented by the Kerners' neighbors and Christiane's former boss, seem unable to find any place for themselves in a radically different society. While their sulky grumbling also implies an unwillingness to accept change, they nevertheless remind us of the massive unemployment, underemployment, and devaluation of prior professional achievements that accompanied the dismantling of East

German institutional infrastructures.<sup>53</sup> As he is finally forced to search through dumpsters for discarded East German food packages and household products, Alex's actions point to one of the ironies of post-unification culture: whereas the Eastern population much preferred Western products during the GDR, once the GDR ceased to exist, East German material culture suddenly enjoyed a newfound popularity. In the late 1990s, the resurrection of East German material artifacts became a mode of popular resistance to the undifferentiated devaluation of everything associated with the East; for former citizens of the GDR, Eastern consumer goods represented the validity of everyday experiences in the private sphere, which they considered separate and distinct from the repressive dictatorship that controlled the structures of public life. Yet *Good Bye, Lenin!* indicates that the rapid disappearance of the GDR was not solely a result of Western takeover, but rather that Easterners' often materialistic enthusiasm also facilitated the abandonment of their former state. Becker calls to mind East Germans' rush to exchange Eastern marks to Western that so embarrassed intellectuals<sup>54</sup> when he depicts, again with fast-motion film, Alex and Ariane's frantic search for their mother's savings account information in order to capitalize on the 1:2 exchange rate. Later in the film, however, the Kerners' attempted currency exchange signifies Easterners' frustrated struggles to conform to a Western timetable that stipulates when and how the supposedly backwards East should catch up to Western levels of development. When Alex and Ariane arrive at the bank, they find that they have arrived two days past the deadline, and that their money is now worthless. Alex's passionate anger at the West Germans' power to off-handedly declare 30,000 East German marks worthless reveals Easterners' lack of political agency in the processes of unification. Without fundamentally challenging German unification

itself, Alex contests this pervasive sense of worthlessness by preserving objects precious not for their exchange value, but for their intimate connection to the spaces and experiences of childhood.<sup>55</sup> In reconstructing his mother's bedroom, Alex ultimately rebels against a speed and comprehensiveness of change that would discard his personal past as quickly and uncaringly as it did the artifacts and institutions of the GDR.

For Alex, Christiane's bedroom becomes a refuge, where the frantic rush to unification and the correspondingly swift dissolution of the GDR have slowed. In recreating the physical environment associated with his childhood, Alex provides himself a temporal space to renegotiate his connection to his past in the face of impending loss. Just as contemporary museums to everyday life in the GDR prefer to focus on household objects rather than remnants of the political sphere,<sup>56</sup> Alex's project steps out of the current of historical upheaval and drastic change, lingering instead in the slower rhythms of private life. To the extent that the preservation of objects relates to his mother's prolonged survival, Alex's museum-like space offers him time to reflect on the possibility of her death, aided by artifacts that establish a mnemonic link to the rapidly vanishing GDR. In a discussion on the changing significance of museums in contemporary culture, Andreas Huyssen suggests that modern museums help us "to negotiate and to articulate a relationship to the past that is always also a relationship to the transitory and to death, our own included;" we may therefore see the museum as "a life-enhancing rather than mummifying institution in an age bent on the destructive denial of death..."<sup>57</sup> Alex's museum space provides him the opportunity to approach loss on his own timetable, to mourn without a deadline, surrounded by material reminders of childhood in an atmosphere of quiet reflection.

Despite the positive potential of Alex's preservation of material culture both to defend against the wholesale disposal of the East and to aid acceptance of personal loss, the deception underlying his reconstruction ultimately precludes a constructive relationship to the past, present, or future. In order to protect his mother from the shock he fears will kill her, Alex must maintain the illusion that the radical changes of the *Wende* have not occurred. Rather than slowly easing his mother, and himself, into the present, Alex works increasingly obsessively to replicate a frozen moment in the past, pouring Western foods into East German jars and bottles rescued from the trash, filming fake East German news broadcasts, even forcing visitors to wear old East German clothes. Unlike a museum, where the physical and temporal distance between viewer and object encourages critical reflection,<sup>58</sup> Alex's complete reconstruction instead envelops his mother in the illusion of a timeless present, where artifacts of the past may not show any signs of age. Boym distinguishes between two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, which seeks to rebuild the lost home, and reflective nostalgia, which lingers lovingly on ruins. As Boym explains,

*Restoration* (from *re-staure*- re-establishment) signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its "original image" and remain eternally young. Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Reflection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and the passage of time.<sup>59</sup>

Both the ordinary passage of time and the historical upheavals of 1989/1990 have transformed Alex's youthful longing for the physical distance of outer space into a longing for the temporal distance of his East German childhood; by artificially collapsing



that temporal distance, however, he resists meditating on the passage of time, and as a result fails to come to an understanding of loss. Though his mother's bedroom insulates him from the accelerated pace of life in the outside world, Alex avoids facing the possibility of death by creating a space where time has effectively stopped. Furthermore, since he cannot reconcile the euphoria of unification with the preservation of the past, Alex's interior and exterior worlds grow ever more distinct. Throughout the film, the West German soccer team's success in the 1990 World Cup serves as a symbol of inner-German unity, inspiring feelings of solidarity and collective celebration. At one point, when Alex rides his moped to his mother's birthday party past countless cars whose drivers excitedly wave German flags, a *Junge Pioniere* song overlaps sounds of honking, and he comments that while the outside world celebrates "die Meister von Morgen," from his mother's bedroom come "die Klänge von Gestern." This juxtaposition of external change and internal stasis presents Alex's project as a regression into the security of the past, where he may escape the turbulence of the present rather than learn to approach it on his own terms. As a result of such a sharp dichotomy between past and present, neither sphere may affect the other; completely intolerant to external influence, Alex's utopian oasis is inherently unstable. For instance, one of the film's key moments contrasts his notion that his mother's bedroom offers an idyllic resting place with the near breakdown of his scheme. As he races home with his latest acquisition, a *Spreewaldgurken* jar that has eluded him all along, the film cuts to a shot of him sleeping, as he relates in voice-over:

Das Leben in unserem kleinen Land wurde immer schneller. Irgendwie waren wir alle wie kleine Atome in einem riesigen Teilchenbeschleuniger. Doch weit ab von der hektischen neuen Zeit lag ein Ort der Stille, der Ruhe und der Beschaulichkeit, in dem ich mich endlich mal ausschlafen konnte.

Yet while he relaxes into what he feels is the safe stillness of his indoor world, his mother finally gets out of bed and decides to venture outdoors. Wandering through streets suddenly advertising Western goods and selling Western cars, she sees a helicopter carrying off a monumental statue of Lenin; as the music builds, slow-motion film shows how Lenin seems to reach out to her before disappearing into the sunset. Just as the SED leadership's refusal to institute Gorbachev's reforms fatally weakened the East German state, Alex's private utopia is undermined by its own inflexibility. Ultimately, Alex is bound to lose his fight against the forward flow of time.

Most importantly, Alex's need to protect his mother from shock leads him to construct a purely positive version of the GDR, which points to the greatest danger of nostalgia: by avoiding mention of anything at all negative, Alex risks trivializing the crimes of the past. In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, a comparatively minor falsification, in no way related to the East German past, reveals this inherent flaw in his scheme. Alex's girlfriend Lara, a student nurse from the Soviet Union, is the only character who consistently pressures him to tell his mother the truth; she serves throughout as the voice of morality, responsibility, and honesty. At Christiane's birthday party, Lara discovers that Alex has told his mother that her father is a teacher for the deaf, when in reality he was simply a cook. Lara storms into the hallway, demanding to know why he lied. Alex replies that he wanted to make his mother happy, and, in her condition, he didn't want to tell her that Lara's father is dead. Clearly hurt, Lara retorts: "Du meinst wenn man sowieso lügt, ist das auch egal." Focused only on keeping his mother happy, Alex injures Lara by disregarding the pain of her past. Beyond this specific moment, Lara's reaction to Alex's lie represents a serious critique of a form of *Ostalgie* that romanticizes the past

while ignoring the horrors perpetrated by the GDR's dictatorial regime. Though nostalgia for the former East encompasses a wide range of divergent attitudes, including the small minority who would want the state back, most relevant to this study are expressions of nostalgia in popular culture. Referring specifically to the impersonation of Lenin and Stalin in Russian pop culture, Boym says that, "The problem, of course, is not with impersonating the leaders of a people for the sake of popular entertainment. The problem is that this kind of "deideologized" attitude has become a new style, almost a new official discourse. No longer subversive, it has turned into an aesthetic norm, a dominant fashion..."<sup>60</sup> For victims of the East German regime, this fashionable wave of nostalgia seems to perpetuate the deeply mistaken notion that the GDR was simply "a harmless welfare state that looked after people's needs."<sup>61</sup> In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, where contentious political issues play out on a personal level, the trauma of Robert Kerner's departure comes to represent the buried trauma of the East German past. Just as Alex's reconstruction fails to move into a future that would mean the loss of both his mother and the state he associates with his childhood, it also fails to confront the pain of the past; Alex's longing for a slower flow of time leads to an idealized recreation of his East German childhood that is as escapist as his earlier fantasies of space. As Alex deceives his mother in order to convince her that the GDR still exists, he deceives himself as well by seeking comfort and security away from the hectic pace of modern life in his recreation of a falsely happy East German childhood past, experienced as eternal present.

With the resurgence of past pain comes the restoration of the normal flow of time: Christiane destroys Alex's fantasy GDR herself when she confesses that her husband did not simply abandon his family twelve years earlier, but rather that she and the children

would have followed him to the West later had she not lost her courage. This revelation causes the second heart attack that Alex has worked so hard to avoid. Earlier in the film, as Alex described how time was racing towards his mother's birthday, we saw a fast-motion image of the quickly spinning world clock at Alexanderplatz as the light of day and night rapidly alternated; as time flows towards Christiane's death, however, Becker conveys the transition from day to night through a series of seamless overlaps as Alex sits by his mother's hospital bed. This slower, gentler, but nevertheless future-oriented passage of time escapes both the frantic speed of the larger historical changes as well as the stasis of Alex's mother's bedroom, suggesting that he has begun to accept his mother's death. After Christiane asks to see her husband one last time, Becker narrates Alex's reunion with his father through pop culture representations of outer space similar to those that initially helped Alex avoid the pain of his father's departure. On his way to see his father, Alex spots a man outside the hospital whom he takes for "der Held [s]einer Jugend," Sigmund Jähn; he is instead a taxi driver who only resembles the famous astronaut. Unlike Alex's central scheme, which seeks a complete and convincing reconstruction of the material environment of his childhood, this Jähn is a mere shadow of the first, removed from his original context and recast within the structures of contemporary life. This play between similarity and difference triggers Alex's memories of childhood while maintaining an awareness that childhood has passed; the Jähn look-alike therefore facilitates a dynamic and thoughtful relationship to the lost past that the objects in his mother's bedroom were unable to provide. Similarly, rather than draw him away from the painful reality associated with his father, as the original broadcast of Jähn's first flight had done, this Jähn drives Alex to his father's house, thereby drawing

him back into a confrontation with the personal past. Once Alex arrives, a crowded party prevents him from immediately meeting his father. Walking through the house, Alex hears the soft theme music of an East German children's television program whose central character is the *Sandmännchen*, a small puppet who also accompanied Jähn into space. Tracing the sound to its source, Alex comes across his younger half-brother and sister, who in the security of their unified family recall the lost innocence of Alex and Ariane's childhood, in addition to representing the reality of his father's new life.

Though time, space, and the pain of both familial and political history separate Alex from his new siblings, he nevertheless manages to communicate with them through the shared language of popular culture. As the children comment that in this particular episode, the *Sandmann* plays an astronaut, Alex interjects that where he's from, they say "cosmonaut" instead; this prompts the children to ask: "Woher kommst du?" to which Alex responds: "Aus einem anderen Land." Alex's remark achieves its poignancy through the remote distance of his "anderes Land" from these children's experience; in this scene, both the evocation of space through the *Sandmännchen* program and the reminder of the temporal distance of his East German childhood provide Alex the perspective needed to negotiate the intersection of present and past. Once Robert Kerner appears, he, too, begins a conversation with Alex in reference to the television show, without realizing that he is speaking to his son; recognition comes when one of the children tells him, "Der heißt Alexander," and the *Sandmännchen* music once again begins to play. Though not every viewer of Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* will be equally familiar with the *Sandmann*, the power of popular culture to evoke Alex's intimate and deeply emotional experiences of childhood is unmistakable; as Robert Kerner recognizes his son, East German children's

popular culture both triggers and communicates the merging of the present reunion with past tragedy. For Alex's sister Ariane, who had always moved resolutely into the future of unified Germany with no regard for the East German past, the confrontation with childhood trauma that Christiane's confession causes is violently disruptive; after searching frantically for letters from her father that her mother had hidden over the years, she huddles on the kitchen floor, sobbing uncontrollably over these remnants of past pain. As we have seen, Alex's encounter with his father is poignant rather than emotionally wrenching; the calm occasioned by the restoration of a slow, forward movement of time extends to Alex's newfound relationship to the reality of his childhood past. Whereas the material restoration of his mother's bedroom allowed him to avoid the prospect of loss, the temporal dislocation of pop culture representatives of space helps Alex to reflect on the inevitable passage of time and to finally admit, to his father, that his mother is dying.

As Alex finally decides to "say goodbye" to both mother and state, he creates one last news broadcast that describes German unification as a collective show of support for socialism rather than capitalism. Though Alex is admittedly still deceiving his mother, his news broadcasts have become a means to renegotiate his personal relationship to the state; the fact that he uses the Sigmund Jähn double, rather than, for example, an Erich Honecker double to announce the unification of Germany suggests that Alex's affection for the GDR stems not from support of the state political structure but rather from his treasured memories of childhood. Throughout the film, Alex and Denis's fake television shows have manipulated media footage from the *Wende* to perpetuate the illusion that the GDR still exists. Showing crowds of people rushing over the border, for example, Alex reinterprets these images to explain that instead of Easterners rushing west, these are

Westerners rushing into the East, turning their backs on the injustices and pressures of capitalism for a better life in the GDR. It is during this particular bulletin that Alex realizes: “Die DDR, die ich für meine Mutter schuf, wurde immer mehr die DDR, die ich mir vielleicht gewünscht hätte.” The use of authentic documentary footage of the *Wende* in *Good Bye, Lenin!* reveals that such images, even though they record actual events, are essentially ambiguous, and therefore vulnerable to the desires and ideological needs of the present. Alex achieves a dynamic relationship to his childhood when he embraces the ambiguity of material and media artifacts, as opposed to his attempts to channel these fragments of the past into one dominant narrative in the form of his mother’s reconstructed bedroom.<sup>62</sup> In relation to the comparison above between Christiane’s bedroom and a museum space, Alex’s shifting relationship to pop culture representatives of space points to a more positive way to engage in a dialogue with the past to allow for multiple narratives and changing layers of meaning, as Huyssen says of modern museums:

...museum and exhibition culture in the broadest sense provides a terrain that can offer multiple narratives of meaning at a time when the metanarratives of modernity... have lost their persuasiveness, when more people are eager to hear and see other stories, to hear and see the stories of others, when identities are shaped in multiply layered and never-ceasing negotiations between self and other, rather than being fixed and taken for granted in the framework of family and faith, race and nation.<sup>63</sup>

Making his final video, Alex inserts his own narrative of the GDR into the larger scope of history, moving into the future at his own pace as he frames his personal link to the GDR in the language of his childhood. As Boym says of reflective nostalgia, “Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future.”<sup>64</sup> In slowing down, but no

longer stopping, the forward movement of time, Alex maintains a temporal distance to rapid external change that allows him to mourn while at the same time moving into contemporary German life.

*Good Bye, Lenin!* ends with the juxtaposition of the gray, dilapidated streets of the former GDR and the bright colors of the Super-8 films that had depicted happy moments in Alex's childhood in the beginning of the film; external reality is contrasted with the warmth of memory as Alex explains that for him the GDR will always be "ein Land, das in meinen Erinnerungen immer mit meiner Mutter verbunden sein wird." Once the Berlin Wall falls, Alex's longing for the slower pace of life afforded by the distance of outer space as well as his East German childhood is a response to his need to mourn the loss of his mother in a temporal space separate from that which so quickly and unsentimentally discarded the GDR. Though he momentarily falls prey to a regressive nostalgia that would avoid moving into the future, Alex nevertheless reveals how the preservation of East German popular and material culture in unified Germany may help former GDR citizens maintain a link to the personal past, facilitating reflection on the passage of time and acknowledging loss in relation to the shifting cultural meaning of East German artifacts. Alex eventually sends his mother's ashes into the air on a firecracker nearly identical to the miniature rocket of his youth; looking up at the fireworks in the night sky, he imagines that his mother is looking down on them from the distance of space, just as Sigmund Jähn did years ago, as the film cuts once again to the original footage of Jähn's first flight.<sup>65</sup> The meaning of his relationship to space has now reversed from the escapism of childhood to acceptance of death in adulthood. For Alex, East German childhood stops being a haven where he may indefinitely postpone



mourning, and instead becomes a collection of cultural signposts and personal memories that open up a dialogue between the real and imagined spaces of past, present, and future. Alex's desire for an alternate experience of time ultimately fulfills its positive potential to recover a lost link to the slower rhythms of East German childhood in the face of rapid and disorienting historical upheaval.

### Chapter Three

#### The Past as Pop Culture in Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*

In her partly autobiographical, partly sociological text *Zonenkinder*, Jana Hensel, thirteen years old when the Berlin Wall fell, first presents her memories of her East German childhood as a series of vague and fleeting impressions of the demonstrations in her native Leipzig in 1989; Hensel describes how her own recollections, obscured by the passage of time and the ensuing political upheavals of the *Wende*, mingle with news reports and other secondary accounts to create a shifting and uncertain image of the lost past. In the first few pages of *Zonenkinder*, Hensel stresses the difficulty of the remembering process, indicating that the rapid dissolution of the familiar social structures of the GDR threatened the retention of childhood memory. She defines the impetus of her work as follows: “Mich ängstigt, den Boden unter meinen Füßen nur wenig zu kennen, selten nach hinten und stets nur nach vorn geschaut zu haben. Ich möchte wieder wissen, wo wir herkommen, und so werde ich mich auf die Suche nach den verlorenen Erinnerungen und unerkannten Erfahrungen machen, auch wenn ich fürchte, den Weg zurück nicht mehr zu finden.”<sup>66</sup>

Hoping to restore a connection to her childhood past through references to fragments of personal memory, physical spaces, and, above all, discarded remnants of East German popular culture, Hensel supplements *Zonenkinder* with reproductions of personal certificates and school assignments, as well as photographs of East German homes and consumer products. Visually, the images in *Zonenkinder* recall Monika

Maron's use of family photographs in *Pawels Briefe*.<sup>67</sup> Just as Hensel turns to material artifacts from the GDR in order to trigger memories of childhood, in *Pawels Briefe*, Maron similarly attempts to bridge the gap between present and past, between her current self and personal, familial, and national history through the use of what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, where a sense of historical continuity is preserved within the confines of our constantly changing, media- and technology-dominated present.<sup>68</sup> With the help of a box of old letters and family photographs, Maron hopes to reconstruct her family history, which traverses the rise of National Socialism, the murder of her Jewish grandfather in the Holocaust, and the establishment of the GDR. A comparison of Maron's and Hensel's respective uses of these traces of memory, however, quickly reveals striking differences in the authors' explorations of the past, pointing more generally to the inherent contradiction between Hensel's stated intentions and the text she actually produces. In *Pawels Briefe*, Maron's family photographs are firmly bound to the text, offering visual documentation of the people and events she describes. Furthermore, the formal application of the photographs mirrors the movement of the narrative: nearly every image appears twice, first in full, then a few pages later cropped to focus in on an individual's face, hands, or eyes; like a close-up in film, this device indicates an attempt to penetrate the psychological individuality of the person depicted by more closely approaching the enigma of the silent image. In *Zonenkinder*, however, the images bear no explicit relation to the text, one another, or to the author herself; instead of concentrating on the specific character of these *lieux de mémoire*, with their potential for establishing a meaningful, personal connection to the past, Hensel appeals to these fragments of the childhood past as part of the general collage of material and popular

culture that characterizes her depiction of the former GDR, the *Wende*, and post-unification Germany.

Like its West German counterpart, Florian Illies's *Generation Golf*,<sup>69</sup> Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* is an example of the German pop literature that arose in the 1990s, written by authors such as Thomas Meinecke, Rainald Goetz, Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre, and Christian Kracht; in general, this literature takes the fragmentation and simultaneity of our media-driven, consumer-oriented world as its starting point, compiling lists of brand names, song lyrics, film titles, recognizable quotes and advertising slogans as its primary mode of expression.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Hensel describes her experience of the dissolution of the GDR solely in terms of changing pop-culture signposts:

Nach und nach waren die ABC-Zeitungen der Kleinen von den Schulhöfen verschwunden und damit nicht nur Rolli, Flitzi und Schnapp, sondern auch Manne Murlaue, unser Freund mit Halstuch und Käppi, der uns auf der dritten Seite immer Tipps gab, wie wir den Timurtrupp besser organisierten... Statt Otto & Alwin-Bildchen sammelten wir Überraschungseier, statt Puffreis aßen wir Popkorn, die 'Bravo' ersetzte 'Trommel'... Aus Popgymnastik wurde Aerobic, und auf der frisch gestrichenen Poliklinik stand eines Morgens plötzlich "Ärztelhaus." Die Speckitonne verschwand und wurde durch den grünen Punkt ersetzt. Mondos hießen jetzt Kondome, aber das ging uns noch nichts an.<sup>71</sup>

Coinciding with the rise of Pop Art in the visual arts, pop literature had its origins in the 1960s, when authors like Rolf Dieter Brinkmann would employ the vocabulary of consumer culture in order to critique the materialism of post-war, West German, petit-bourgeois society; conversely, though the language of 1990s pop authors resembles that of its predecessors, the newer literature ultimately affirms our postmodern experience of the world.<sup>72</sup> For instance, of Illies's ironic, yet affirmative depiction of the "reiches Yuppietum" of the 1980s, Baßler says: "Der Grundton solcher ironischen Distanz ist

nicht kritisch, sondern liebevoll. Illies bekommt so eine Menge von der eigenen Kultur in den Blick; dabei sieht er nirgendwo einen Grund, sein Leben zu ändern.”<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, in striving for a mimetic reproduction of contemporary life,<sup>74</sup> recent pop literature also uncritically reproduces the crisis of memory brought about by our accelerated experience of time in the technological age; for instance, rather than provide relatively stable *lieux de mémoire* as points of continuity with the past, Hensel’s catalogue of East German popular culture swings from object to object in a movement that mirrors, rather than corrects, our relationship to a past that is always disappearing before we have time to reflect. Together with the affirmative embrace of consumer culture, both Hensel and Illies posit their middle-class upbringings as somehow representative for the “generation” that is the subject of their respective texts; though both authors approach their childhood pasts with irony, the public debate sparked by Hensel’s “wir” nevertheless requires a closer examination of whether Hensel’s pop literature model is an appropriate approach to the complexities of post-unification discourse of the former GDR. This question is all the more pressing given the fact that *Zonenkinder* often attempts to move beyond the tone of light-hearted irony that Illies maintains throughout *Generation Golf*, as Hensel juxtaposes representations of continued East/West conflicts in unified Germany with her collection of consumer-culture references. Finally, as Hensel seeks to pull her East German past into the stream of contemporary popular culture, she creates an atmosphere of simultaneity that collapses the temporal distance between past and present, thereby limiting readers’ ability to reflect on the lost childhood world. In an article on contemporary German literature, Jörg Magenau contrasts the goals of Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster*, a deeply personal

exploration of the formative influence of everyday fascism that seeks to answer the question, “How did we become what we are today?” with the irony of young pop authors’ autobiographical prose, which focuses on former fashion and pop-culture trends rather than on individual or historical development, posing the question, “How could we possibly have been like we were in the past?”<sup>75</sup> Contemporary pop literature bears little relation to Christa Wolf’s work, or Maron’s work as referenced above, and therefore should not be judged by the same set of standards; yet the fact that the opening pages of *Zonenkinder* seem to pose Wolf’s deeper question, “How did we become what we are today?” while the rest of the text laughingly asks, “How could we possibly have been like we were in the past?” points to the underlying inconsistency within *Zonenkinder* as a whole, namely, the struggle between critical reflection and noncommittal irony that makes the East German text simultaneously more interesting, and more problematic, than Illies’s *Generation Golf*. This chapter will examine the extent to which Hensel’s adherence to pop literature’s essentially affirmative stance towards both consumer culture and social relations in general threatens to undermine her attempts to examine more seriously the continued East/West conflicts in post-unification Germany. My discussion of Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* will therefore explore the implications of discussing the GDR past and the transition to post-unification Germany in the language of pop literature.

Comparing the process of writing pop literature to electronic music, author and DJ Thomas Meinecke suggests that pop should address the past as a reference, or sample, in the present: “Dabei vergegenwärtigt Pop durchaus real Vergangenes: Im Zitat. Im Sample. Wobei ein Sample auch Erinnern auslöst.”<sup>76</sup> Pop operates as a “Literatur der

zweiten Worte,”<sup>77</sup> forming new texts out of the pre-existing of media and popular culture; for this reason, Jörgen Schäfer suggests, “[e]s ist daher kein Zufall, dass im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs über Pop im Allgemeinen und über Pop-Literatur im besonderen immer wieder *Recycling*-Diskurs aufgegriffen wird.“<sup>78</sup> Despite Hensel’s initial promise to embark on a search for lost origins in the depths of her childhood past, she later suggests that the true impetus for *Zonenkinder* comes one night at a party with a crowd of western European friends: as the others joyfully exchange stories about their shared childhood culture, about the Smurfs and Pippi Longstocking and Asterix, Hensel realizes that her memories do not spark the same euphoria. She says:

Mit einem Schlag hatte ich es satt, anders zu sein als all die anderen. Ich wollte meine Geschichten genauso einfach erzählen wie die Italiener, Franzosen oder Österreicher, ohne Erklärungen zu suchen und meine Erinnerungen in Worte übersetzen zu müssen, in denen ich sie nicht erlebt hatte und die sie mit jedem Versuch ein Stück mehr zerschlugen... Wie ein Sommerkleid war sie anscheinend aus der Mode geraten und taugte nicht einmal mehr für ein Partygespräch.<sup>79</sup>

Rather than explore the formative influences of her East German youth, in *Zonenkinder* Hensel hopes instead to gain the ability to cite, or recycle, her own past experiences into the *Partygespräch* of the present. Though she says that she does not want to “translate” her memories into a cultural language the others will understand, she does indeed convert her experiences of both her East German childhood and the *Wende* into the language of Western consumer culture in order to facilitate integration into the “schönes warmes Wir-Gefühl” that arises out of the western Europeans’ easy reference to the shared pop-culture past. Thus Hensel’s descriptions of growing up in the GDR closely resemble Illies’s depiction of his socialization within the comfort of West German middle-class prosperity. For instance, discussing her family’s never-ending quest for Western goods, Hensel catalogues the fine distinctions between Eastern and Western products, indicating that

even as a child she recognized the status symbol that, for example, Western jeans represented. She ironically insists: “Wir wurden in einem materialistischen Staat geboren, obwohl heute oft das Gegenteil behauptet wird. Mit einfachen Statussymbolen baute jeder seine kleine Welt, und bereits als Kinder konnten wir Käfer- und Boxer-jeans von solchen aus dem Westen unterscheiden.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in *Generation Golf*, Florian Illies playfully describes his and his classmates obsession with owning the right pair of jeans: “Wir waren noch viel zu sehr mit der Wahl der richtigen Jeans beschäftigt... Es gab immer verschiedene Jeansfirmen, die zu bestimmten Zeitpunkten ultimativ in waren, aber im Rückblick verwandeln sich Replay, Wrangler, Mustang, Edwin, Joker und Levis zu einer einzigen undurchschaubaren blauen Stoffmasse...”<sup>81</sup> Hensel’s “translation” of her childhood experiences into the language of West German consumer culture points more generally to her assimilation into Western patterns of life following the *Wende*; rather than critique the materialism of Western popular culture, she instead hopes to imitate, and adopt, Western styles of dress, speech, and behavior: “Dabei hatten wir in den Anfangsjahren jede freie Minute genutzt, um den Westen zu beobachten, zu erkennen und zu verstehen. Wir wollten ihn täuschend echt imitieren. Ich hatte keine Lust mehr, aufzufallen, im Supermarkt wegen meines schlechten Geschmacks angemacht zu werden...”<sup>82</sup> Yet as she strives for successful integration into the West, for a sense of community amongst her West German peers to which the ability to reference her past in the social environment of the present also belongs, Hensel risks separating herself from her fellow Easterners, who perhaps cannot adapt to post-unification society with such ease.



Although the social function of a shared pop-culture past, the notion of childhood memories as material for a *Partygespräch*, is in its way important to a general sense of belonging amongst friends, Hensel's focus on Western consumer culture comes at the expense of sensitivity towards her fellow East Germans. Her evaluation, for example, of her parents' successful social interaction in the GDR as opposed to unified Germany depends to a large extent on their habits of consumption. In her memories of the East German past, Hensel takes pride in her parents' former ability to secure Western goods through complicated networks of friends and relations, even when they had no relatives on the other side of the border; in the GDR, Hensel insists, "wussten unsere Eltern noch, was gut war und was nicht."<sup>83</sup> In contrast, she cringes in embarrassment at her parents' supposedly bad taste when faced with free access to Western consumer culture following the *Wende*; her tone shifts from irony to sarcasm as she describes the huge piles of gifts at her family Christmas: "Die schöne, bunte Warenwelt konnte manche überfordern... Quantität dominierte hierbei eindeutig über Qualität, Pralinenschachteln hatten die Ausmaße von Tischfußballfeldern, mit Keksrollen konnte man gewaltätig werden, und die letzten Lebkuchen würden wir, so viel war sicher, im Sommer am Strand verzehren."<sup>84</sup> Her disdain for her parents' post-*Wende* bad taste recalls Stefan Heym's open contempt for East German consumerism following the fall of the Wall:

The very same people who had risen up and taken their fate into their own hands after decades of kowtowing and fleeing, the people who had only recently seemed to be marching nobly into a promising future became suddenly a horde of frenzied shoppers, backs pressed into stomachs, marching only to the Hertie and Bilka department stores on the hunt for glitzy trash. What expressions on their faces as, which cannibalistic lust, they rooted like pigs through display tables intentionally placed in their paths by Western shopkeepers...<sup>85</sup>

While Heym criticizes what he sees as Easterners' materialistic greed, as their all-too-enthusiastic embrace of Western consumer culture, Hensel criticizes her parents not for their consumerism, but for their lack of sophisticated and discriminating taste. In response to Heym's essay, Monika Maron denounces what she calls "the arrogance of the man with his stomach full, the man disgusted by the table manners of the starving."<sup>86</sup> As she points out that, as opposed to the majority of the population, "[w]riters in the GDR were a particularly spoiled group,"<sup>87</sup> we are reminded that Hensel, too, is "spoiled" when it comes to the difficult transition from the East German state to unified Germany. Not only has her youth spared her the challenges of adulthood in a dictatorial regime, as well as facilitated her assimilation into post-*Wende* society, she also holds a privileged position amongst members of her own generation, having had the opportunity to travel widely as a student and, particularly following the publication of *Zonenkinder*, enjoying a successful career as an adult. At times, it seems as though Hensel recognizes the discrepancy between her life and the experiences of those whom the rapid processes of unification left behind. Comparing the world of her childhood to an inaccessible museum, Hensel notes that her urge to assimilate completely into Western life has perhaps forever alienated her from the companions of her youth:

In dieser Zeit ist aus unserer Kindheit ein Museum geworden, das keinen Namen und keine Adresse hat und das zu eröffnen kaum noch jemanden interessiert. Gehe ich manchmal, nicht oft, allein und wie im Traum in den verdunkelten Räumen umher, treffe ich viele alte Bekannte und freue mich, sie wieder zu sehen. Im selben Augenblick aber bemerke ich, wie übel sie es uns genommen haben, dass wir uns damals so plötzlich von ihnen abwandten, ohne uns zu verabschieden, und je näher ich mit meinem Gesicht an die Vitrinen herangehe, desto weiter weichen sie zurück. Ein bisschen sehen sie unter dem Glas wie Tote aus, und auf einmal bin ich nicht mehr ganz sicher, ob sie jemals unsere Freunde und wir mit ihnen am Leben gewesen sind.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, Hensel sees no reason to fundamentally alter her affirmation of post-unification consumer culture;<sup>89</sup> though she occasionally hints at the inequalities in the fates of various segments of the East German population following the *Wende*, she does so from a secure, successful position within contemporary German society.

As the quote above indicates, in *Zonenkinder* Hensel supplements the collection of pop-culture signposts that describes her East German childhood as well as her path to Western assimilation with more serious observations of social relations in post-unification Germany; throughout the text, her tone vacillates between quiet reflection and upbeat, light-hearted irony. Many of Hensel's memories are bittersweet, and her observations of post-*Wende* life reflect the inherent contradictions that characterize her attitude towards her East German origins; for example, she says of the results of her Western assimilation:

Wofür man mich hielt? In den letzten Jahren immer häufiger für einen Westler. Ich hatte meine Lektionen gelernt und war nicht mehr zu enttarnen... Aber seltsamerweise machte es mich jedes Mal traurig, wenn jemand glaubte, ich sei aus Nürnberg oder Schleswig-Holstein. Hätte man mir aber gesagt, ich käme aus der DDR, das sehe man mir doch sofort an, dann hätte ich Mühe gehabt, mich gerade zu halten und nicht ein paar Tränen in die Augen zu bekommen.<sup>90</sup>

Hensel also attempts to create a kind of multivocality through the juxtaposition of multiple East/West discourses that, on the one hand, represents a desire for greater mutual understanding across the borders of the divided national past; on the other, by making her generation the subject of her text, describing experiences and impressions in terms of an all-inclusive "wir," Hensel masks, and therefore strengthens, her narrative control, undermining any hope of letting others' voices be heard. Towards the end of the text, Hensel calls her generation "die ersten Wessis aus Ostdeutschland;"<sup>91</sup> having spent childhood in GDR, and adolescence and early adulthood in unified Germany, she feels

that strict distinctions between East and West do not apply to her and her peers' unique biographies. Hoping to encourage this East/West synthesis beyond the experiences of her own generation, Hensel sets oppositional discourses of German unification against one another, revealing them to be both irresolvable and unproductive. For instance, she illustrates how neither Western nor Eastern parents want their fixed attitudes towards the *Wende* challenged: at dinner with the parents of West German friends, Hensel shows how her Eastern friends learn to affirm the Westerners' proud observations of the supposedly vast improvements in both the appearance and the quality of life in the former GDR; at home, however, Hensel suggests that young Easterners know better than to interrupt or contradict their parents' bitter catalogue of East German discontent in post-unification Germany. As she says of arguments between her East German neighbor Silvia and Silvia's West German boyfriend about the merits of communist ideals versus the practical demands of unification: "Ich halte mich aus solchen Diskussionen raus... wir Jüngeren lassen die Unterschiede Unterschiede sein. Wir wollen sie nicht vertuschen, aber irgendwie wollen wir sie auch nicht mehr besprechen."<sup>92</sup> For Hensel, constantly reiterating the differences between East and West becomes a barrier to intimacy; she describes how even though she enjoys exchanging childhood stories with her West German boyfriends, she nevertheless wishes they had more in common: "Eng aneinander liegend, wünschen wir uns, wir wären gleich, geben uns einen Ruck und haben keine Lust mehr, zehn Jahre nach dem Fall der Mauer noch immer Ost-West-Diskussionen zu führen."<sup>93</sup> In *Zonenkinder*, Hensel seems to argue for the coexistence of a variety of views and experiences; rather than eradicate differences, she wishes instead that differences not be so divisive.

Yet Hensel's depiction of others' viewpoints, together with her implicit assertion that she is a representative of her generation, privileges her own version of events above her fellow East Germans'; *Zonenkinder*'s occasionally awkward marriage of humorous reminiscence and serious commentary, as well as its precarious balance between irony and arrogance, comes out most strongly in the chapter on East German parents. As indicated above, Hensel refers to the complaints of the older generation of Easterners in order to reveal the continuation of East/West conflicts in post-unification Germany; she furthermore suggests that this division exists along generational lines as well, as younger people adapt more easily and more quickly to the new structures of society. She presents her parents' views as follows:

Für die jungen Menschen, ja, da sei das heute eine prima Zeit... es sei ihr größtes Glück, wenn ihre Kinder etwas aus den neuen Möglichkeiten machten. Ihre Zeit aber sei das nicht mehr: Die da drüben hätten einfach nichts begriffen...und, ehrlich gesagt und unter uns, hätte man ihnen damals, im Herbst 89, prophezeit, dass es so kommen würde, sie wüssten nicht, ob sie an den Montagabenden nicht doch lieber zu Hause geblieben wären. Denn dafür, nein, dafür seien sie nicht auf die Straße gegangen.<sup>94</sup>

Though Hensel later says that she feels sympathy for her parents, the device of indirect speech in this context diminishes the validity of their views; her tone is lightly mocking as she positions herself above what comes across as her parents' limited understanding: "...unsere Eltern glaubten in solchen Momenten nur noch zeigen zu müssen, wie sehr sie die heutigen Zustände, wie sie sagen, durchschauten."<sup>95</sup> Throughout *Zonenkinder*, Hensel describes events as an omniscient narrator, claiming to know and to understand a multitude of divergent views and experiences, including those of her peers; obscuring the influence of her own, individual biases, of the singularity of her specific background, Hensel hopes to legitimize the broad scope of her text through the use of the plural

subject “wir.” On Hensel’s generalized “wir,” Moritz Baßler looks beyond the author’s specific intentions and suggests that the move away from an individualized subject is a characteristic of pop literature in general. He notes that: “[D]ie Verfahren des Popromans [waren] stets darauf ausgerichtet, jede Art von individueller Geschichte ihrer Helden möglichst blass zu halten... um dafür möglichst viel literarische Energie aus dem Sammeln und Generieren von popkulturellen Phänomenen zu gewinnen.”<sup>96</sup> In *Zonenkinder*, however, Hensel’s “wir” is more than a simple rhetorical device, and in claiming to speak for a generation, she provoked a great deal of controversy in the public sphere. Readers’ responses indicate that they felt obliged to identify with *all* of the author’s memories, which of course would be impossible. As Volker Weidermann comments, *Zonenkinder* is “ein Generationsbuch, das beharrlich “Wir” sagt, wo “Ich” gemeint ist, und eine Gemeinschaft beschwört, die es in der Wirklichkeit nie gab.”<sup>97</sup> Pointing out that Illies uses the “wir” form as well, Baßler contrasts public reception of *Zonenkinder* and *Generation Golf*:

Sein “Wir” fungiert als ein großer und problematischer Gleichschalter, der Vorher und Nachher, ironische Distanz und Affirmation, analytische Beobachtung und geschmacksbestimmende Arroganz, reiches Yuppietum und übergreifenden Generationsanspruch zusammenzwingt. Seltsamerweise hat sich über dieses “Wir” jedoch niemand wirklich aufgeregt.<sup>98</sup>

Though a variety of factors may account for this differing reception, not the least of which is the sensitivity surrounding Hensel’s topic, one possible explanation is that Illies’s book attempts to be nothing more than an ironically nostalgic catalogue of West German popular culture. Despite the middle-class arrogance he undeniably projects, his self-conscious humor nevertheless works to potentially deflect harsh criticism, as he says in reference to his own work: “Wir haben, obwohl kaum erwachsen, schon jetzt einen

merkwürdigen Hang zu Retrospektive, und manche von uns schreiben schon mit 28 Jahren ein Buch über ihre eigene Kindheit, im eitlen Glauben, daran lasse sich die Geschichte einer ganzen Generation erzählen.”<sup>99</sup> My sense is that it is not Hensel’s ironic depiction of her childhood past that proved to be such a point of contention, but rather those moments when she reaches beyond pop literature’s focus on popular and consumer culture to comment more seriously on life in post-unification Germany, as, for example, in the following depiction of her parents:

Sie lagen ja schon am Boden, inmitten der Depression einer ganzen Generation, und wir, die wir mit viel Glück und nur dank unserer späten Geburt um ein DDR-Schicksal herumgekommen waren, wollten die am Boden liegenden nicht noch mit Füßen treten... Unsere Eltern, so sehen wir es, sind müde und ein bisschen zu alt für die neue Zeiten.<sup>100</sup>

The arrogance in *Zonenkinder* stems from Hensel’s assumption that her experiences in her position of middle-class privilege are representative, that East Germans’ sense of displacement and dissatisfaction in unified Germany belongs only to those whom she depicts as aging parents who are unable to adapt to the “Spielregeln des Westens.”<sup>101</sup> Though Hensel’s reflections on post-*Wende* life lend *Zonenkinder* a depth that *Generation Golf* lacks, she nevertheless fails to arrive at a sensitive depiction of the problems that touch all age groups and income brackets in the former East, finally denying those who fall outside her narrow concept of a generation, which she defines only in relation to her own experiences, the understanding and respect they deserve.

Jana Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* is ultimately oriented around the idea of a *collection*: drawing together pop-culture references from East and West Germany, as well as competing East/West discourses and her own observations of post-*Wende* life, Hensel presents her experiences in both the childhood past and the present as a catalogue of

divergent fragments. For instance, in reference once again to Easterners' preference for West German commodities, she writes: "Kamen die Sticker von a-ha, C.C. Catch oder Modern Talking aus Polen statt aus der 'Pop Rocky' oder 'Bravo' und die Glitzis nicht aus dem Intershop, dann waren uns das vor den anderen peinlich."<sup>102</sup> While my discussion of Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* compared the protagonist Alex Kerner's memory work to a museum, Hensel's means of preserving the past more closely resembles an archive. Referring to contemporary pop authors' penchant for mimicking the ever-changing multiplicity of our media-driven world in a collage of consumer-culture references, Baßler calls these writers "die neuen Archivisten."<sup>103</sup> For Pierre Nora, the archive adds what he calls a prosthesis-memory to life; a function of our hopelessly amnesiac age, it serves as a repository for our obsessive documentation of both past and present in the face of constant change:

The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs- hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. Fear of a rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable... Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstruction. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Magenau remarks that the 1990s saw a tremendous demand for literary biographies in Germany:

No episode was too trivial to be seen as containing important and memorable details of the German past. And no part of everyday life was too mundane to be recorded. No one was too young to already have a past. The exceptional historical situation of the post-wall period meant that even twenty and thirty year-olds could look back on a time of the past and thus could write autobiographical works.<sup>105</sup>



Thus the twin strains of pop literature's "Beschreibungsfetischismus"<sup>106</sup> and the contemporary obsession with memory as archival recording unite in works like Hensel's *Zonenkinder* and Illies's *Generation Golf*. Yet just as pop authors' mimetic reproduction of contemporary consumer culture fails to critique our fast-paced, postmodern lifestyle, so too does "the synchronicity of the archive"<sup>107</sup> preclude meaningful reflection on our relationship to the past. Like the twenty-four hour cable news cycle, like the collapse of our perception of time and space in the simultaneity of the internet, taken as a whole the archive only contributes to our crisis of memory; obsessive recording paradoxically becomes a means of forgetting as the sheer mass of material collected fills the empty spaces needed for abstraction and interpretation. The archive requires our imaginative intervention in order to become an effective *lieu de mémoire*;<sup>108</sup> therefore it provides only a starting place, not the end itself, for a thoughtful connection to the past.

This limitation of the archive points precisely to *Zonenkinder*'s central shortcoming: together with the unconnected images and documents she reproduces alongside the text, Hensel's collage of artifacts and anecdotes of childhood fails to cohere. By mirroring the simultaneity of a decentralized archive, where records of the past and present coexist in the stream of the constant present, Hensel provides a superficial overview of objects, places, and experiences that is strangely out of sync with her stated intention to embark on "die Suche nach den verlorenen Erinnerungen," as well as her fear "den Weg zurück nicht mehr zu finden."<sup>109</sup> As Alexander Cammann remarks: "Hensels Handwerkzeug ist das Schließpapier für die Oberflächenbearbeitung, nicht das Bohrgerät zum Vordringen in tiefere Schichten."<sup>110</sup> Had Hensel simply focused on childhood memory, such superficiality perhaps would not have proved such a point of

contention; however, in *Zonenkinder* she also attempts to more seriously observe her generation's experiences of the difficult transition of the *Wende*, and to remark on its specific relationship to the East German past. In a rare comment on the SED dictatorship's mechanisms of repression, Hensel reveals the inadequacy of pop literature's superficial, affirmative, and above all apolitical approach to its surrounding culture:

Wie sollten wir glaubhaft versichern können, wir hätten uns damals nicht von der Stasi anwerben lassen, wir wären nicht in die SED eingetreten, sondern hätten Flugblätter verteilt, Untergrundzeitschriften publiziert und einen Ausreiseantrag gestellt? Unsere DDR war zu Ende, bevor wir solche Fragen beantworten mussten... Wie sollten wir aber dann über das Leben unserer Eltern ein Urteil fällen?<sup>111</sup>

It is, however, possible to critically examine the crimes of the past without necessarily asserting one's own moral superiority; Hensel's gesture of understanding is ultimately too simplistic, too quickly expressed, and too quickly abandoned to constitute a nuanced approach to the complexities of former East Germans' relationship to their past. Finally, in eliminating the personal dimension through her use of the generalized "wir," in deemphasizing the specific nature of the individual performing this archival collection, Hensel's assemblage of East German pop culture combines with her focus on the GDR as a "Herkunftsraum" instead of a political system<sup>112</sup> to create a version of the East German past that has lost its specifically East German character. For instance, Hensel's description of her excitement the night before the *Pionierdisco* on the anniversary of the foundation of the *Junge Pioniere* resembles any child's excitement the night before any celebration, regardless of the specific national context.<sup>113</sup>

In response to former Easterners' heated contestation of her use of a supposedly representative "wir" as her narrative subject, Hensel dismissively suggests that her fellow

East Germans are simply not accustomed to the postmodern plurality of modern public life:

Die Reaktion auf "Generation Golf," dieses Schulterzucken, das ist so eine postmoderne Aufgeklärtheit. Es ist normal, dass an jeder Ecke und zu jeder Zeit jemand eine Meinung äußert. Im Osten dagegen ist man so einem postmodernen Laissez-faire überfordert. Wie ich bereits sagte, ist man auch diese Art der Öffentlichkeit nicht gewöhnt. Vielleicht ist man dort noch irgendwie ehrlicher oder wahrhafter und pocht auf seine Individualität, was andererseits aber auch zu Verkrampfung und Bitterkeit führt. Diejenigen, die sich missverstanden oder falsch dargestellt fühlten, haben regelrecht gegen den Text gekämpft, nur weil sie das Gefühl hatten, dass der Text nicht ihrer Sichtweise entspricht.<sup>114</sup>

On the contrary, I would argue that former Easterners' contestation of Hensel's "wir" suggests not only a resistance to the notion that Hensel's privileged experiences are somehow representative of a generation, but also, for lack of a better term, a post-postmodern sensibility, a renewed desire for personal narrative, introspection, and reflection that can exist alongside as well as in opposition to our media-dominated, fast-paced world. Hensel's postmodern, pop-culture jumble of consumer-culture references is in itself an ineffectual tool for meaningful engagement with the personal past, for as Andreas Huyssen points out, "The idea of the comprehensive data bank and the information superhighway is just as incompatible with memory as the television image is with material reality."<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the public response to Hensel's *Zonenkinder* points to the work's greatest potential: though Hensel fails to take up any specific aspect of her past experience or past pop culture in a way that would provide a more meaningful exploration of her East German childhood, the text itself, like the archive, may operate as a *lieu de mémoire*, offering readers a mode of memory as well as a point of discussion and debate.

## Chapter Four

### Popular music in Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee*

Leander Haußmann's<sup>116</sup> lively and humorous film *Sonnenallee* begins with a quiet evocation of the childhood world: soft music accompanies slow camera pans that travel along the magazine clippings, signs, and objects of a teenager's bedroom. Haußmann carefully constructs the melancholy tenderness of nostalgia through the matched pace of musical rhythm and camera movement, appealing to both collective and personal memory by placing images of popular films and musicians in an intimate setting. "Ich wollte immer ein Popstar sein," begins a boy's voiceover, and he establishes that he lives in the GDR and is currently making a tape of a song forbidden by the authorities. The camera continues to pan from the wall behind the bed to the tape recorder, then along the boy's legs and feet, conspicuously avoiding his face. We enter his bedroom, and the film, as we would a museum space, where public and private memory merge in an atmosphere of quiet contemplation.

The first cut occurs when we finally see the boy's face, and he introduces himself as Michael Ehrenreich, seventeen years old. As he finishes recording his song, the lyrics of the music that has been playing throughout match up with the action on the screen: as we hear "...things slow down but they never stop..." we see Micha press the "stop" button on his tape recorder. Similarly, as Micha leaves his bedroom, his voiceover, the song text, and the image on the screen merge in the word "Sonnenallee" as the film cuts to the title. Until this point, the music had retained its traditional role in narrative cinema,

supporting the filmic image and the character's speech while refraining from calling explicit attention to itself;<sup>117</sup> at the end of the opening sequence of *Sonnenallee*, however, the words of the song leap into the foreground of our conscious awareness.

This chapter will focus on the uses of popular music in *Sonnenallee*. By directing my attention specifically to the radical foregrounding of song lyrics within the central narrative, I intend to show first how *Sonnenallee* differentiates between everyday experience in the GDR and the repression of the state apparatus, and second, separates admiration of West Germany from a blanket acceptance of western values and attitudes by exploiting the intimate association of popular music with youth culture in order to reclaim happy memories of East German adolescence. I will argue that this shift in the traditional image-music hierarchy, which disrupts the sensory hegemony of the filmic image by pulling music up to the level of our primary attention, mimics the “bottom-up” formation of contemporary East German identity. In her discussion on the various forms of East German self-understanding in unified Germany, Patricia Hogwood notes that whether former East Germans once advocated “third-way” socialism, complain bitterly about post-unification inequalities, or revel in nostalgia, what these manifestations of post-communist identity share is a “popular ‘grassroots’ quality,” as “[t]hey are led from below rather than from above.”<sup>118</sup> Similarly, in his study on East German cinema, Joshua Feinstein briefly discusses scholarly “bottom-up” approaches to understanding East German society: as opposed to Cold War totalitarianism theory, which compares the hierarchical political structures and network of state repression in the Third Reich and the GDR, such approaches explore the limits of state power and suggest ways ordinary citizens contributed to and participated in their own society.<sup>119</sup> By turning our attention

to, for example, consumer design, fashion, and popular music, rather than focusing strictly on the mechanisms of SED repression and control, we “facilitate[] the integration of the GDR into the broader outlines of German national and late-twentieth-century history.”<sup>120</sup> In both content and form, *Sonnenallee* advocates a more nuanced understanding of GDR life that would allow room for ordinary citizens’ happy memories outside the confines of the discredited political system; the film’s portrayal of the vitality, irrationality, and rebellious potential of popular music and youth culture moves between the repression of the former East and the dismissiveness of the former West to establish an East German identity that deserves continuity in unified Germany and to rehabilitate experiences that deserve representation in discourse on the GDR past. In the pages that follow, I will show how the formal “bottom-up” movement of popular song lyrics in *Sonnenallee* reflects the contextual “bottom-up” approach to the East German experience, articulated in terms of youth culture.

My analysis of *Sonnenallee*’s depiction of the relationship between youth and popular music rests on two assumptions: first, that popular music helps to create and define a separate youth culture that is, on some level, subversive of adult society; and second, that both the prominence and the familiarity of popular songs in *Sonnenallee* similarly subvert the codes of traditional narrative cinema. Marxist scholars, most notably those of the Frankfurt School, argue that popular music cannot be rebellious within a capitalist society because it depends so completely on the economic and technological structures of capitalism for its success.<sup>121</sup> Yet as Jonathan Epstein notes, the machinations of the music industry are a separate issue from the importance of music for adolescents;<sup>122</sup> furthermore, it is undeniable that in a socialist society, teenagers’ love

of a form of music intimately bound to capitalism is necessarily subversive. This last point was not lost on GDR cultural functionaries: in a state that depended on young people's adherence to socialist values for its ultimate survival, SED authorities perceived teenagers' obsession with popular music as the poisonous influence of American *Kulturbarbarei*, an intolerable threat to their political and ideological control.<sup>123</sup> Youth subcultures formed in the GDR in part around young people's ingenious navigation and subversion of official repression in their quest to fulfill their passion for popular music.<sup>124</sup> In *Sonnenallee*, Haußmann thematizes teenagers' insuppressible dedication to popular music in defiance of GDR cultural policy with Wuschel's relentless pursuit of the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*. Likewise, just as teenagers' rebellious admiration of pop music may threaten the stability of adult society, the use of pop music in cinema disrupts a film's carefully constructed narrative world. Film scholars commonly observe that music in cinema functions primarily to draw spectators more deeply into the narrative's emotional space; as Claudia Gorbman notes, "[f]ilm music lowers thresholds of belief."<sup>125</sup> According to the needs of traditional cinema, film music ought to avoid calling explicit attention to itself. Considering the use of popular music, while songs with lyrics compete with the action for our conscious attention,<sup>126</sup> familiar music carries differing personal associations for each spectator that "automatically introduce into the narrative uncontrollable and disruptive elements of the 'outside' world."<sup>127</sup> Wendy Everett emphasizes, however, that in autobiographical cinema, filmmakers purposely foreground the destabilizing effects of popular music in their attempt to capture the shifting dialogue between present and past, individual and collective, and remembered and imagined experience that constitutes personal narrative.<sup>128</sup> Importantly, by inviting

“uncontrollable and disruptive elements of the ‘outside’ world”<sup>129</sup> into their films, filmmakers also renounce absolute authorial control in favor of a more democratic relationship to spectators; corresponding, for example, to Christa Wolf’s narrative strategies in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, both author and audience work to create a multi-layered version of a shared past. The democratic influence of the film music’s bottom-up movement into our conscious awareness mirrors what Peter Wicke, in his study of rock music in the GDR, calls “the inalienably democratic character of the grassroots cultural movement of young people” and their relationship to the music itself.<sup>130</sup> Therefore when *Sonnenallee* draws popular songs out of their traditional supporting role as mere background music, the film not only encourages open-ended reflection through the familiarity of the music, as Everett suggests, but, by upsetting the hierarchical image-music relationship in particular with music we culturally associate with adolescent rebellion, also foregrounds the anti-authoritarian nature of youth subculture itself. As we shall see later, the formal and contextual centrality of East German teenagers’ relationship to popular music in *Sonnenallee* has larger implications for the film’s defense of memories of particular aspects of the GDR past. At this point, I would like to look more concretely at *Sonnenallee*’s formal use of popular songs to develop the central concerns of the narrative as a whole.

One of the first songs to be dramatically foregrounded as described above, an Elvis-like ballad that serves as a theme to Micha’s pursuit of his love interest, Miriam, undermines the quiet nostalgia of the opening scene in order to establish the self-conscious irony towards the intensity of adolescent experience, as well as nostalgia for that experience, that characterizes the film as a whole. Haußmann exploits the pop



culture cliché of the crooning 1950s love song to describe what for Micha is the earth-shattering, overwhelmingly intense experience of his first love. When the slow, romantic song “Stay” begins to play, the camera quickly zooms in to a close-up of Micha, then cuts to a long shot of a girl coming out of the apartment building across the street. Micha’s voiceover reveals his love for “die sagenhafte, wunderbare, anbetungswürdige, unerreichbare Miriam.” Meanwhile, life on Sonnenallee has ground to a halt; together with the crowd of awed men and boys, we watch Miriam, bathed in soft focus, languorously walk in sync with the song into a close-up. The song echoes Micha’s thoughts: as we hear the hackneyed lyrics, “No, don’t turn around/ Can’t you be my lovely angel/ And never, never, go away,” Miriam does indeed turn around and goes back inside. The overloaded visual and aural signification of this scene ironically distances us from full identification with Micha’s emotions: though we support Micha in his quest for Miriam’s affection, instead of straightforwardly accepting his professed undying love with a seriousness that a relationship between adults might demand, we understand that his devotion is partly a function of the intensity of adolescent emotional life. Moreover, the anachronism of a song that recalls the 1950s in a film that recalls the 1970s upsets the carefully reproduced, carefully controlled museum space that Micha’s bedroom initially presents. After all, the boys in *Sonnenallee* listen to the Rolling Stones, not Elvis. By distancing us from *Sonnenallee*’s temporal context, the foregrounded rift in historical musical time, like the rift in the steady passage of time caused by Miriam’s appearance, allows us to recognize the purely subjective nature of Micha’s experience of adolescence, and, moreover, of his experience of the GDR. *Sonnenallee* does not reproduce external reality, but rather the internal spaces of memory. As Everett suggests of contemporary

autobiographical films in general, the tenderly nostalgic museum space of the opening scene in *Sonnenallee* is only a starting point for a more dynamic and ironically self-conscious relationship to East German adolescence that the rest of the film represents:

...the recreation before us on the screen of the nostalgic childhood world, with its almost obsessive attention to detail, to which the faithful reproduction of authentic recordings of songs may seem to belong, is not the aim of the film but, in a sense, merely its starting point; the context in which the total experience of childhood memory may resurface.<sup>131</sup>

On a similar note, and in clear relation to the over-coded introduction of Micha's love for Miriam, Paul Cooke says of *Sonnenallee*'s physical setting:

...the East German spectator begins to sense that s/he is not being presented with a straightforwardly mimetic representation of life in the East, but rather a hyper-real simulation, through which his/her sense of nostalgia is indulged, but at the same time challenged... This, in turn, suggests that East German spectators are not to take the film at face value, but are rather being invited to explore critically their relationship to their pre-unification experience.<sup>132</sup>

The "hyper-real" presentation of Micha's experiences, as well as his surroundings, forsakes the highly controlled nostalgia of the opening scene in favor of the ironically destabilizing force of popular music that more effectively recreates, rather than simply describes, the intensity of youth. In this scene, the purpose of explicitly foregrounding "Stay"'s clichéd lyrics is to establish a self-conscious, though nevertheless affectionate, distance to Micha's adolescent experience that translates more generally to the film's depiction of the GDR past.

Since "Stay" seeks to draw attention to the intensity and naïveté of youth, it denies the audience the pleasure of recognition: although the song strongly *recalls* a 1950s love ballad, it nevertheless was written specifically for the film. Conversely, Haußmann welcomes former GDR citizens' joyful rush of personal associations when he employs the East German band the Puhdys' 1973 hit "Geh zu ihr,"<sup>133</sup> originally written

by Ulrich Plenzdorf for Heiner Carow's film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, which in turn was the most popular East German film ever made. At the climax of *Sonnenallee*'s love story, as Micha runs to bring Miriam the diaries he has written for her, the lyrics of "Geh zu ihr" seem to direct his actions, to propel him forward, as he quite literally "goes" to Miriam. Quoting the earlier film even further, Haußmann reminds audiences of *Paul und Paula*'s climactic scene, in which Paul breaks down Paula's door with an ax, when Micha encounters Winfried Glatzeder, the actor who played Paul, in Miriam's stairwell. Wearing the same famous frilly shirt that marked his transformation to a fairy tale hero in *Paul und Paula*, Glatzeder turns and asks his 1990s counterpart, "Ein Beilchen gefällig?" By quoting *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* to this extent, Haußmann appropriates for *Sonnenallee* all the insuppressible happiness associated not only with Carow's film, but with the audience's memories of that film as well. Perhaps more importantly, Haußmann also refers to a film whose popularity rests, as director Heiner Carow suggests, on "the fact that it was contradictory to the maxims of the times which were constantly imposed from outside, from the top."<sup>134</sup> Like *Sonnenallee*, *Paul und Paula* celebrates the energy, vitality, and irrational spontaneity of youth in enthusiastic defiance of the dominant culture; both films also rely largely on the countercultural appeal of popular music to establish a separate social space where love and personal happiness are paramount. While earlier East German films emphasized the importance of individual contribution to building socialism, often drawing citizens out of their private lives and into fuller and more productive participation in socialist society, *Paul und Paula* not only exalted the private rather than the public sphere, it also implicitly condemned personal involvement in the state apparatus through the figure of Paul. Guided by his love for the sensual and

emotionally exuberant Paula, Paul is transformed from a stiffly rational careerist into a romantic hero: he renounces what is almost certainly a high-powered job in the hated *Stasi* for a life based on love, compassion, and familial closeness. Similarly, in *Sonnenallee*, Haußmann associates personal growth with a break with the state: Micha steps into adulthood when he declines conscription into the *Nationale Volksarmee* after Wuschel is nearly killed at the Wall, though this decision will cost him his chance at a university education. In this context, by disrupting the hegemony of both the image and the narrative through its prominence and familiarity, the formal use of “Geh zu ihr” in *Sonnenallee* reflects, and appropriates, *Paul und Paula*’s subversion of official socialist values. Thus when *Sonnenallee* fondly recalls the GDR, it is a GDR defined by the subcultural opposition that *Paul und Paula* represents.

The varied use of “Geh zu ihr” in *Sonnenallee* furthermore points to the continued difficulty of representing East German life in terms of happiness and spontaneity in post-unification Germany. In contrast with the scene described above, in which the song sincerely expresses Micha’s love and determination, when “Geh zu ihr” first plays, Wuschel comments on how terrible the music is at a school dance where no one is dancing. “Geh zu ihr” accompanies Micha as he crosses the empty dance floor to ask Miriam to dance; unlike the later scene, however, when Miriam accepts Micha’s advances, here he is cruelly rebuffed. Just as Miriam prefers her Western boyfriend to Micha, the boys at this point prefer Western music to Eastern. This preference for all things Western and the resulting undifferentiated rejection of the East speaks to Cold War assumptions of Western political, economic, and cultural superiority that were held on both sides of the Berlin Wall. In post-unification Germany, the Western-favored

imbalance of power and wealth led citizens of the former GDR to rediscover and assign new value to discarded elements of everyday East German life, including happy memories that otherwise had no place in discussions of the horrors of totalitarianism. As stated in the press material for *Sonnenallee*, for East Germans “[e]s wird Zeit, dass man darüber spricht, was die DDR noch war außer Mauer, Stasi und Zentralkomitee.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore *Sonnenallee*’s second, celebratory use of the Puhdys’ “Geh zu ihr” constitutes a newfound appreciation for East German culture; the characters must *learn* to embrace the East in the face of Western post-unification disparagement. The film’s shifting attitude towards the song mirrors the change in Miriam’s feelings towards Micha: as they kiss for the first time, she says, “Und ich dachte, die im Westen küssen besser.”<sup>136</sup> Like the contemporary nostalgic fervor surrounding artifacts of East German popular and material culture, a great deal of *Sonnenallee*’s appreciation of life in the East comes as a reaction against assumptions of Western superiority as well as the predominance of tales of repression and ideological control. Nevertheless, some criticized *Sonnenallee* for supposedly trivializing the pain of the SED regime’s many victims; as I have indicated in the introduction, the organization *Help, e.V.*, designed to protect victims of political violence, filed suit against Haußmann in 2000 for insulting those arrested, injured, or killed while trying to escape at the Berlin Wall.<sup>137</sup> That *Sonnenallee* should encounter such resistance on the one hand, and remain extraordinarily popular on the other, recalls *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*’s divergent reception between official disapproval and popular success. I must hasten to point out that I do not wish to compare the views of dogmatic SED cultural functionaries with those of an organization like *Help, e.V.*, as well as former Westerners’ and Easterners’ legitimate concern that, once again, victims’

suffering is being erased from the German historical record; my goal is only to establish that in very different contexts and for very different reasons, two very similar depictions of life in the GDR touched a nerve in the public sphere. Though SED officials did not ban *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, their distrust of the values the film ultimately upholds indicates the extent to which *Paul und Paula* develops an alternative cultural space.<sup>138</sup> In its own way, *Sonnenallee* is similarly subversive of dominant post-unification discourse that sees life in the GDR only in terms of fear, misery, and oppression. Thus the formal prominence of “Geh zu ihr,” together with the thematic similarities between *Sonnenallee* and *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, show not only that *Sonnenallee* aligns itself with *Paul und Paula*’s celebration of life, love, and with the private sphere against the rigid dictates of Party doctrine, but that the later film also works to reestablish a continuity, a lost link, to older countercultural traditions in East German popular culture. *Sonnenallee*’s formal foregrounding of the Puhdys’ “Geh zu ihr” therefore represents a call for a similar movement of ordinary East Germans’ experiences into the foreground of contemporary views of the GDR past.

Together with the comparatively subtle critiques of Westerners’ supposed superiority described above, *Sonnenallee* also explicitly depicts West German disparagement of life in the East, while at the same time ultimately affirming German unification by the fact that the film’s Western music is not foregrounded in the way discussed thus far. Rather than commenting on the action, and thereby demanding that we pay equal attention to the image and the sound, Western songs used in the film refrain from fundamentally disrupting traditional cinematic hierarchies. Furthermore, while “Geh zu ihr” refers audiences to a very specific moment in GDR cultural history, we

sense that *Sonnenallee*'s selection of one Western song over another is somewhat arbitrary, outside of the songs' general evocation of the 1970s. That said, the boys in *Sonnenallee* nevertheless use Western music to develop a sense of group identity and as a means of self-expression. For instance, after Micha hears Miriam say that she doesn't have a boyfriend, he dances joyfully on the table at the playground singing the American song "The Letter." His celebration is quickly interrupted, however, by mocking calls from the West: at this moment, and throughout *Sonnenallee*, West Germans watch, and taunt, their Eastern neighbors from observation platforms overlooking the Berlin Wall. Cooke compares the spectator/spectacle relationship between Westerners and Easterners in *Sonnenallee* to a zoo, suggesting that the West Germans treat the East Germans "like animals trapped behind bars for Western amusement."<sup>139</sup> At one point, Haußmann situates the camera on the platform behind two Westerners who watch with anticipatory pleasure as the local police officer chases down Micha; looking down on the scene below, we are morally implicated in the Westerners' voyeurism, which in turn recalls the Western-dominated media's sensationalist obsession with the *Stasi* past following the fall of the Wall.<sup>140</sup> That the platform, as a visual representation of Western power, condescension, and voyeurism, belongs to the present rather than the past is clear when the Westerners call Micha an "Ossi," a term that, along with "Wessi," did not come into use until after unification. As Western taunts break into Micha's love-inspired song and dance, therefore, we see unambiguously how present-day West German dismissal of the East German experience threatens to destroy Micha's happy memories of his first love. Micha must stop singing in order to confront the Westerners: striding over to the Wall, he threatens to blow them away once he comes back from his three-year service in the army.

Knowing, however, that Micha eventually refuses the army, we must see him here not as defending his country, but rather his memories. After threatening the Westerners, Micha resumes singing the same Western song, showing that his relationship to the West is a nuanced one, extending beyond the reactionary anger or uncritical admiration that his threats or his appreciation of Western music would, taken on their own, otherwise signify.

*Sonnenallee*'s second use of "The Letter" further supports this nuanced relationship to the West, appropriating the song into Eastern culture in order to assert East Germans' agency in bringing down the Wall, as well as, through its origin and formal application, indicating that *Sonnenallee* advocates a change of perception in unified Germany rather than in its fundamental political structure. "The Letter" plays shortly after Wuschel's quest for the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street* comes to a disappointed end: once he discovers that "die unberührte Musik der Stones" is really a fraud, Micha cheers him up by imagining that they can produce the music themselves. As we watch them play air guitar, we hear an altered version of the music on the record nondiegetically on the soundtrack; though Wuschel's desire for the Rolling Stones record remains unsatisfied, this new, unknown music nevertheless becomes their own. They dance to the balcony, where we see that a crowd has gathered in appreciation of their imaginary music; surveying their fans, Micha and Wuschel then launch into a cover of "The Letter." Tossing his t-shirt to Miriam down below, Micha is, for a moment, the pop star he wished he was at the beginning. At this point "The Letter" becomes a revolutionary anthem, expressing all the insuppressible youthful joy that has accumulated throughout the film as the teenagers, as well as their parents, dance towards the Berlin



Wall. The emotional power and energy of the song is clearly associated with the power of the Eastern population, whose brave protests historically led to the opening of the border to the West. This application of an American song as the East Germans, in open defiance of GDR authorities, dance to bring down the Berlin Wall reveals that *Sonnenallee* does not represent a form of nostalgia, or *Ostalgie*, that would want the wall back. Yet when *Sonnenallee*'s Easterners appropriate Western culture as an expression of their own thoughts and desires, they assert that they would prefer to approach the West on their own terms. As described above, Haußmann foregrounds the lyrics of the Puhdys' "Geh zu ihr" in an attempt to carve out an East German countercultural space opposed to the repression and dogmatism of the SED, as well as the single-minded focus on such repression in the post-unification context; in both cases, the movement of the lyrics mimics the bottom-up movement of GDR youth into the dominant culture. By *not* foregrounding the lyrics of "The Letter," or, for that matter, any other Western song, Haußman implicitly suggests that his insistence on youthful rebellion does not extend to a call for the destruction of the present-day union with the West. Yet the song's modification, first, through Micha's singing, and second, as an obvious cover that is initially inspired by Micha's imagination, suggests that Western music in *Sonnenallee* signifies neither a wholesale rejection, nor a wholesale acceptance, of Western attitudes and influence.

As Micha and Wuschel jump off the balcony to join the dancing crowd below, they leap from the continuous present of childhood into the forward movement of time. At the end of the film, the dancers trickle out of the frame as "The Letter" slowly fades. Our last impression of *Sonnenallee*, of Micha's childhood paradise, is a long, backwards

tracking shot of the empty street, already gray from the asphalt and house façades, which then becomes actual black and white film. As opposed to the energy, color, and vitality that characterize the rest of the film's depiction of life on Sonnenallee in particular, and in the GDR in general, this vision of the street is one of desolation and depression. The backwards tracking shot, together with the black and white stock, recalls an earlier scene in which Micha and his friend Mario mock Western assumptions of privation in the East. When they spot a busload of Western tourists coming across the border, they chase after it with sucked-in cheeks and outstretched arms yelling "Hunger! Hunger!" The film cuts to a black and white shot of the boys from inside the back window of the bus as it drives away; we then hear a British woman say, in English, "Those poor boys! Just like we saw in Africa!"<sup>141</sup> Thus the final visual depiction of the street reflects how Westerners' overly negative, undifferentiated view of the East has shaped the overall impression of the GDR past; just as the Westerners' taunts intrude into Micha's happy celebration of his first love, here we see how the dominant discourse of depression and privation much more insidiously creates a barrier between Micha and his own, lived experiences. Haußmann drives this point home when Nina Hagen's<sup>142</sup> 1973 East German hit, "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen," begins to play on the soundtrack. The song calls sharp attention to the loss of happy memories, in favor of the "black and white" version of the GDR outlined above. Though the song's lyrics refer concretely to actual color film for photographs, the association with memories of life on Sonnenallee as "color film" is obvious, as Hagen sings: "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen, mein Michael/ Nun glaubt uns kein Mensch wie schön's hier war/ Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen, bei meiner Seel'/ Alles blau und weiss und grün und später nicht mehr wahr." The centrality of the lyrics

of the popular East German song supports *Sonnenallee*'s insistence on the possibility of happy memories of the former East; once again, the formal application of the song serves metaphorically to pull ordinary East Germans' experience into the foreground of contemporary discourse on the GDR. *Sonnenallee* makes its strongest case for retaining positive memories of the GDR by linking them, through the film's use of popular music, with the experiences of a rebellious East German youth, whose values and goals are at best marginal, at worst contradictory, to official aims.<sup>143</sup> Micha's memories of the GDR are personal, private, as he says in his last, voiced-over lines: "Es war einmal ein Land, und ich hab' dort gelebt. Und wenn man mich fragt wie es war, es war die schönste Zeit meines Lebens, denn ich war jung und verliebt." The joyful dance towards the Wall, followed by a final resurgence of East German popular culture in the form of "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen," suggests that the characters in *Sonnenallee* lament neither the passage of time, nor the end of the GDR, but rather the loss of happy memories associated with the East.

Thus *Sonnenallee* ultimately defends against the perceived challenge to happy memories of life in the GDR. In addition to triggering audiences' personal recollections of the exuberant rebelliousness of youth, *Sonnenallee*'s use of popular music attempts to create a space where such positive experiences of the East are possible. Yet in the midst of defending a particular version of the East German past, of insisting both in the film and with the film itself on the importance of the representation of these experiences in the post-unification context, *Sonnenallee* does not claim to be history. Rather the film conveys that the image of life in the East it presents is, like any story of the past, a construction, shaped by the emotional and ideological needs of the present. Nowhere is

this relationship to the past more evident than when Micha creates his diaries for Miriam. Having told her, in a drunken moment, that he has dedicated “unzählige Tagebücher” to the development of his feelings for her, Micha must scramble to produce these diaries; in doing so he not only creates a version of his personal past that he thinks will impress Miriam, he also defines, and eventually becomes, who he wants to be. On the whole, *Sonnenallee* shares this intentionally fictional approach to the East German past, as well as its positive potential: through its depiction of life outside totalitarian repression, the film establishes points of possible continuity between the GDR and unified Germany, as well as acknowledges that life in the East had value that now has been lost, thereby helping to combat former Easterners’ feelings of displacement in the post-unification present. In an attempt to realistically depict past events, to arrive at some notion of truth, memory, of course, is inherently unreliable. What *Sonnenallee* hopes to show, however, is that although memories of childhood do not constitute an accurate record of life in the East, the emotional importance of the memories themselves is real; in the end, *Sonnenallee* resists losing the remembered feeling of being “young and in love” along with the GDR’s discredited political system. As Brussig writes in the last lines of his literary adaptation of *Sonnenallee*:

Wer wirklich bewahren will, was geschehen ist, der darf sich nicht den Erinnerungen hingeben. Die menschliche Erinnerung ist ein viel zu wohliger Vorgang, um das Vergangene nur festzuhalten... Denn die Erinnerung kann mehr, viel mehr: Sie vollbringt beharrlich das Wunder, einen Frieden mit der Vergangenheit zu schließen, in dem sich jeder Groll verflüchtigt und der weiche Schleier der Nostalgie über alles legt, was mal scharf und schneidend empfunden wurde.  
Glückliche Menschen haben ein schlechtes Gedächtnis und reiche Erinnerungen.<sup>144</sup>

As my discussion of the song “Stay” hopefully shows, *Sonnenallee* does not straightforwardly idealize either the adolescent or the East German past; instead, much of the film’s humor comes from its self-conscious, ironic distance from the intensity and naïveté of childhood, as well as from the trials and tribulations of daily life in the GDR. Nevertheless, the film is unapologetically, even defiantly, nostalgic; as Haußmann has said in response to the idea that *Sonnenallee* is an expression of *Ostalgie*: “Entweder ist man nostalgisch oder nicht. Wie heißt das dann bei den Westlern? Westalgie?”<sup>145</sup> In its portrayal of what Micha calls “die schönste Zeit meines Lebens,” *Sonnenallee* establishes that East Germans, like West Germans, have the right to fondly remember happy childhood experiences. While we know that Micha’s memories are not objective fact, through the radical foregrounding of Nina Hagen’s “Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen,” for example, *Sonnenallee* refuses to let us accept the final, colorless picture of the GDR as fact, either.

*Sonnenallee* finally seeks to preserve childhood experiences, or at least their traces in the personal and popular imagination, in the language in which they were lived. Asked in an interview whether his conception of *Sonnenallee* attempts to build a museum to the GDR, Thomas Brussig replied, “Der DDR ein Museum bauen? Eher dem eigenen Erwachsenwerden.”<sup>146</sup> Rather than retain throughout the sense of a museum space created in the opening scene, *Sonnenallee* presents the rebellious energy of youth in a way that most effectively recreates it. By radically foregrounding popular music, Haußmann allows both personal and collective memories of East German adolescence to become part of the fabric of the film’s narrative, willfully disrupting traditional cinematic hierarchies in favor of a structure that more closely mirrors the democratic, grassroots

nature of youth subcultures, which in turn provides a site for former East Germans' contemporary, grassroots identity formation. To return to the countercultural appeal of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, Feinstein notes in his discussion of representations of everyday life, or *Alltag*, in East German films that:

...the image of East Germany articulated in many *Alltag* films found a genuine and lasting popular resonance. Indeed, the continued popularity of such works as *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* and recent sociological data suggest the persistence of unique social and cultural attitudes among former East Germans even after national unification. *Alltag* films thus helped to articulate an alternative East German self-understanding, which functioned as a means of resistance to, and of accommodation with, the conformist pressures of the socialist system.<sup>147</sup>

We may therefore attribute *Sonnenallee*'s tremendous popularity at least in part to its resurrection of this alternative self-understanding in the face of former Westerners' overly negative assumptions about life in the GDR. As both a depiction and a manifestation of popular culture, however, we cannot take *Sonnenallee* too seriously; popular culture ultimately resists close analysis, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, harsh critique. *Sonnenallee*'s strength lies in its ability to elicit, and thereby to defend, audiences' simultaneously affectionate and ironic feelings towards East German adolescence; in particular, by calling attention to an ordinarily subordinate and often ignored filmic element, in addition to evoking the insuppressible energy of youth, the bottom-up movement of popular music in *Sonnenallee* mirrors former East Germans' insistence on the value of their own experiences of the GDR in post-unification Germany.

## Conclusion

As the preceding pages have shown, the filmmakers and authors of the works in this study choose to remember the GDR in terms of private life, focusing on the small, intimate spaces of childhood and family rather than on large-scale political conditions or historical change. This is the experience of the GDR conveyed in the notion of a “niche society,” which contrasts public conformity with private freedom.<sup>148</sup> Yet as Maron’s *Stille Zeile Sechs* suggests through its parallel representation of patriarchal control in both the home and the state, the divisions between public and private, party and population, were not so clearly defined in the GDR; as shown by the pervasive influence of the *Stasi* and by the high levels of participation in the mass organizations and in the SED, there was, as Mary Fulbrook says, “a remarkable degree of intertwining of state and society.”<sup>149</sup> In *The Powers of Speech*, David Bathrick describes the West German media’s exaggerated, oversimplified representation of this complex interrelationship: referring to a cover story by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which depicted a massive, sinister-looking octopus holding a tiny East German flag in one of its tentacles under the caption “The Long Arm of the *Stasi*,” Bathrick comments:

...in the social imagination of post-cold war and post-Wall German politics, the *Stasi* had become... a metaphorical monster whose tentacles enveloped and indeed poisoned every aspect of East German public and private life... In the phantasm of the culture industry and the frenzy of post-Wall allegations, the GDR had already become metamorphosed into the *Stasi* as a monster sea serpent.<sup>150</sup>

Naturally, neither romantically nostalgic musings on the lost childhood past nor Western, post-Wall sensationalism provide an accurate or complete story of the GDR; the latter view, however, has had a concrete political impact on both the extensiveness of the

assimilation of East German institutional infrastructures, economy, and patterns of daily life into a Western model, as well as on the historical evaluation of the East German past.

In an attempt to counter overly negative representations of the GDR that tacitly affirm Western societal organization, levels of industrial development, and forms of national identity, the works under discussion search for a place beyond “The Long Arm of the *Stasi*” where specific forms of East German identity, as well as individual and collective experiences, may be articulated and preserved in order to arrive at a more differentiated version of the East German past. This is the GDR as it exists in memory, in imagination, enveloped in the soft glow of nostalgia; these works do not represent the physical reality of external spaces, but rather reflect the internal spaces of the mind. Like Rosalind’s alternate, female-centered sphere, where love, community, and imaginative play offer an anecdote to the antagonism and paranoia she experiences within the patriarchal structures of GDR society in Monika Maron’s *Stille Zeile Sechs*, in *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee* in particular, the remembered childhood past becomes an idyll where a link to the personal past may be maintained in the face of radical and comprehensive change. Andreas Huyssen suggests that since “the dialectic of remembrance and future projection is the sine qua non of modern utopian thought,” in contemporary society, which has witnessed the end of both capitalist and socialist utopian dreams of the future, utopian longing has shifted “from its futuristic pole toward the pole of remembrance...”<sup>151</sup> In the temporal and physical no-places of East German childhood, Alex and Micha may linger in personal memory, transforming the image of the past into a projection of the future: for instance, as Micha writes his diaries for Miriam, he invents the person he wishes he had been, and becomes who he would like to be.



In my discussion of Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*, I compared Alex's attempts to preserve East German material culture to a museum, where he has the opportunity to reflect on the passage of time and come to an understanding and acceptance of loss while surrounded by mnemonic links to his personal past in the form of artifacts of everyday life. Though Haußmann's *Sonnenallee* quickly undermines the quiet museum space of the opening scene through the radical foregrounding of popular music, the songs themselves work to engage the viewer in the remembering process; furthermore, like the pop-culture representatives of space in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, popular songs in *Sonnenallee* bridge the gap between present and past, shifting in meaning from the East German to the post-unification context, mediating between collective and individual memory. These manifestations of popular culture form what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, as discussed in the chapter on Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*. Nora comments:

The *lieux* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial- just as if gold were the only memory of money- all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee*, however, Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* fails to produce adaptable and meaningful *lieux de mémoire*; rather than evoke the reflective spaces of the museum, Hensel's text mimics the simultaneity of the archive. By attempting to incorporate her East German childhood into the language of Western consumer culture, Hensel creates what Moritz Baßler calls "Benutzeroberflächen"<sup>153</sup> that are incapable of arriving at a unique portrait of an East German childhood or providing

truly insightful observations of the *Wende*. Most importantly, while in *Sonnenallee* the radical foregrounding of familiar songs draws viewers' unpredictable personal associations into the very fabric of the film, creating a democratic narrative structure, Hensel's narrative voice, the all-inclusive "wir," dominates the text by supposing her experiences to be representative of those of her generation, and therefore paramount. The weaknesses of Hensel's *Zonenkinder* highlight the strengths of *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Sonnenallee*, which engage in a dynamic, productive relationship with the past, thereby contributing to former East Germans' self-understanding.

In *Stille Zeile Sechs*, Rosalind bitterly reproaches Beerenbaum for "stealing" the biographies of younger generations in his pursuit of Stalinist goals; she tells him that she has to wish for his death "weil Sie jedes Haus, jedes Stück Papier, jede Straße, jeden Gedanken, weil Sie alles, was ich zum Leben brauche, gestohlen haben und nicht wieder rausrücken."<sup>154</sup> Though the later works I discuss in this study are never this accusatory of the dominant culture or political system, the protagonists nevertheless express hostility towards the perceived devaluation and disavowal of their personal experiences during the transition to unified Germany. For instance, in *Sonnenallee*, West Germans' taunts from a platform overlooking the Berlin Wall invade Micha's happy memories of his first love; he responds by pointing an imaginary gun at the Westerners and threatening to blow them away once he returns from his three years in the army. Furthermore, in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, as Alex rails against the West German bank teller who has declared the Kerner's 30,000 East German marks worthless, Becker reveals that the devaluation and subsequent disappearance of Eastern material culture and institutional infrastructures implied that the experiences with which they were associated were worthless now as well. In the years

following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Western-dominated media's representation of the East German past solely in terms of the SED leadership's means of control became a way to devalue any experience associated with the former GDR. By turning our attention to everyday life in the private sphere, to the sites of childhood memory, we focus on an aspect of East German life that will always remain inextricably bound to individuals' most cherished experiences amongst family and friends, which is therefore inseparable from their memories of the GDR itself. Finally, restoring a relationship to East German popular culture in post-unification Germany contests the pervasive sense of worthlessness that so infuriates Alex; while the Eastern institutional framework may be gone, recalling the contours of private life allows personal experiences to once again have meaning for the present, together with contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the East German past.

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## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> C.f. Andreas Huyssen's comment on his own reaction to German unification: "I began to accept the idea of unification as inevitable, necessary, even desirable when it became clear in 1990 that the East German population was not willing to serve as guinea pigs in yet another political experiment, that of a "third way" democratic socialism." In: *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 40. Huyssen's article originally appeared as: "After the Wall: The Failure of German Intellectuals," *New German Critique* 52 (1991): 109-143.

<sup>2</sup> See Helen Cafferty, "Sonnenallee: Taking Comedy Seriously in Unified Germany," *Textual Responses to German Unification*, eds. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001) 225 for a brief discussion of this lawsuit; see also: "Leander Haußmanns Darstellung der DDR in seinem Film 'Sonnenallee' gefiel der Hilfsorganisation für Opfer politischer Gewalt 'Help' gar nicht," *Die DDR im WWW*, 27 January 2000, 6 April 2005 <<http://www.ddr-im-www.de/Aktuelles/Aufarbeitung/270100.htm>> as well as Thomas Brussig's open letter to the organization: "Ein offener Brief von Thomas Brussig an den 'Help e.V.'," *Die DDR im WWW*, 29 January 2000, 29 January 2005 <<http://www.ddr-im-www.de/Aktuelles/Aufarbeitung/290100.htm>>. Both documents are available through: "Autoren: Thomas Brussig," *Hamburger Bildungsserver: Informationen für Lehrende und Lernende*, ed. Wolfgang Stanik, 8 February 2005, 7 April 2005 <<http://www.hamburger-bildungsserver.de/welcome.phtml?unten=/faecher/deutsch/autoren/brussig>>.

<sup>3</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba, and David P. Conradt, "The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany," *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997) 54.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Hogwood, "After the GDR: Reconstructing Identity in Post-Communist Germany," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16.4 (2000): 46.

<sup>5</sup> The emotional tenor of *Stasi* revelations also precluded differentiation of the *quality* of artists' and intellectuals' collaboration; in *The Powers of Speech*, David Bathrick contrasts the actions of Müller and Wolf, of which there is no evidence that either of them informed on friends or colleagues, or provided information not readily available in other published sources or the media, with the actions of the poet Sascha Anderson, whose reports on an entire generation of young intellectuals offered "a wealth of potentially incriminating detail" (222). See the epilogue to *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 219-242.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979) 10.

## Chapter One

<sup>7</sup> Karl Maron returned to Germany in 1945 with the "Gruppe Ulbricht" from emigration in Moscow, more specifically at the notorious Hotel Lux. He then became the chief of police in the GDR, and was the Minister of the Interior from 1955- 1963. He married Monika Maron's mother, Hella Iglarz, in 1955, when Monika was 14 years old. Karl and Monika Maron had a difficult relationship, and the depiction of the conflicts between the fictional Rosalind and her father Fritz Polkowski is a close parallel to Maron's own experience. See Maron's *Pawels Briefe: Eine Familiengeschichte* (1999; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2001). See also Brigitte Rossbacher, "The Status of State and Subject: Reading Monika Maron from *Flugasche* to *Animal triste*," *Wendezeiten- Zeitwenden: Positionsbestimmungen zur deutschsprachigen Literatur: 1945-1995*, eds. Robert Weninger and Brigitte Rossbacher, *Studien zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur/ Studies in Contemporary German Literature Ser. 7* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1997) 204 for a comparison between Ulbricht, Pieck, and Karl Maron.

<sup>8</sup> Monika Maron, *Stille Zeile Sechs* (1991; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2003) 135.

<sup>9</sup> Maron 17.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 22-30.

<sup>11</sup> Fulbrook 30.

<sup>12</sup> Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 93.

<sup>13</sup> Maron 107-8.

<sup>14</sup> Maron 19.

<sup>15</sup> Maron 77.

<sup>16</sup> Maron 41.

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, the incident in question concerns Beerenbaum's imprisonment of the Sinologue "Count" Karl-Heinz Baron, a friend of Rosalind's who attempted to have a manuscript published in the West while Beerenbaum still held a powerful position at the university. In response to Rosalind's confrontational questions, Beerenbaum responds: "Ich war selbst verfolgt, sagte er fast tonlos, Grete im Konzentrationslager. Es ist nicht leicht, einen Menschen ins Gefängnis zu schicken. Wir sind keine Unmenschen. Kommunisten haben gegen Unmenschen gekämpft. Wir durften nicht studieren. Wir haben bezahlt, daß andere studieren durften, immer, zuerst als Proleten mit unserem Schweiß, dann mit dem Geld unseres Staates. Arbeitergroschen. Diese Bildung war unser Eigentum, wer damit weglief, ein Räuber, Ihr Sinologe ein Dieb, jawohl. Ein Dieb gehört ins Gefängnis" (206).

<sup>18</sup> Maron 108.

<sup>19</sup> Maron 108-9.

<sup>20</sup> Maron 116-17.

<sup>21</sup> Maron 117.

<sup>22</sup> Maron 162.

<sup>23</sup> Maron 141-42.

<sup>24</sup> Maron 142.

<sup>25</sup> Maron 141.

<sup>26</sup> Maron 142.

<sup>27</sup> Maron 112.

<sup>28</sup> Maron 139.

<sup>29</sup> After the Sensmann episode, Beerenbaum, feeling mistreated, asks Rosalind why she is so bitter; looking for an answer, she thinks: 'Ich mußte etwas sagen, worauf er in der Legende seines Lebens, an die er inzwischen selbst glaubte, keine Antwort finden konnte; etwas, das jenseits der Politik lag' (148).

<sup>30</sup> Roszbacher 205.

<sup>31</sup> Maron 159.

<sup>32</sup> Maron 109. Birgit Konze notes that in Maron's work in general (particularly in the novels *Flugasche*, *Die Überläuferin*, *Stille Zeile Sechs*, and *Animal triste*), the female protagonists' parents relate to their daughters as communists rather than as loving fathers and mothers: "In den Werken von Monika Maron wird die bedingungslose Unterordnung selbst der privaten Lebensumstände und Beziehungen unter den real existierenden Kommunismus jedoch zur wichtigsten Eigenschaft der Erwachsenen, und so erinnern sich die Josafras [of Flugasche] and Rosalindes an ihre Eltern nicht als Vater und Mutter, sondern eben als Kommunisten. Als solche sind diese bemüht, ihre Tochter ebenfalls zu einer Kommunistin zu erziehen. So gut wie nie ist in der Erinnerung die Rede von einer Eltern-Kind-Beziehung mit den dazu gehörigen Zärtlichkeiten und Streitigkeiten, fast immer geht es um die politischen Ziele der Erziehung." In: "Das gestohlene Leben. Zur Thematisierung und Darstellung von Kindheit in der DDR im Werk von Monika Maron im Vergleich mit Werken von Uwe Johnson, Irmtraud Morgner und Thomas Brussig." *Monika Maron in Perspective: 'Dialogische' Einblicke in zeitgeschichtliche, intertextuelle und rezeptionsbezogene Aspekte ihres Werkes*, ed. Elke Gilson, German Monitor No. 55 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 182.

<sup>33</sup> Maron 113. In her discussion on East German film, Joyce Marie Mushaben's comments on the East German educational system resonate both with my discussion on the parent/child relationship between the state and the citizen in the GDR and with Rosalind's conflict with her father at school: "As was true of all societal institutions in the GDR, the educational system mirrored two fundamental miscalculations on the part of the SED leadership. The first was the premise of the "eternal childhood," viz., the assumption that adult members of the working class had yet to reach the appropriate stage of revolutionary consciousness and thus could not be trusted to advance socialism independently of the vanguard party. The second was the notion that youth had to be subjected to the same standards of ideological orthodoxy as adults- at that point in the life cycle when they are most naturally curious, critical, rowdy, and most likely to challenge

any kind of authority.” In: “GDR Cinema De-/Reconstructed: An Introduction to the ‘Forbidden Films’,” *GDR Bulletin* 19.1 (1993): 8.

<sup>34</sup> Fulbrook 28.

<sup>35</sup> Maron 159-60.

<sup>36</sup> Maron 35.

<sup>37</sup> Maron 135.

<sup>38</sup> Konze remarks that for all of Maron’s focus on childhood, depictions of children at play are almost entirely absent from her work: “Es gibt in den Werken von Monika Maron nur sehr wenige Darstellungen von Kindern, von kindlichen Spiel oder Schilderungen von Ereignissen in Schule und Familie, die in irgendeiner Weise Kindlichkeit ausdrücken; eine Beziehung zu anderen Kindern, kindliches Miteinander und Spiel fehlen, bis auf wenige Ausnahmen, völlig” (189). In *Stille Zeile Sechs*, for instance, as Rosalind first visits the district of Berlin where Beerenbaum and other party functionaries live, she observes that “...niemals sah man in den Gärten ein spielendes Kind” (9). Konze comments, “In den Gärten der Parteibonzen, in der DDR als dem Bild von einem Garten Eden der Funktionäre und Genossen, ist kein Platz für spielende Kinder” (190).

<sup>39</sup> Maron 38.

<sup>40</sup> Maron 191.

<sup>41</sup> Sigrun D. Leonhard, “Testing the Borders: East German Film between Individualism and Social Commitment,” *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. Daniel J. Goulding (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 59. Rossbacher says of women authors in the GDR in particular: “GDR women writers such as Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner, Helga Königsdorf and Monika Maron, for example, employed narrative techniques such as dreams, fantasy and myth to subvert the realist paradigm and rational discourse and create an aesthetic realm which allowed for the (free)play of possibilities for social change” (194).

<sup>42</sup> Maron 191.

<sup>43</sup> Maron 155.

<sup>44</sup> Maon 216.

<sup>45</sup> Maron 218.

<sup>46</sup> Carl Pietzcker, ““Sie zwingen mich, das Abscheulichste zu tun, was ich mir denken kann: jemandes Tod zu wünschen”: Monika Marons “Stille Zeile sechs,”” *Der Deutschunterricht: Beiträge zu seiner Praxis und wissenschaftlichen Grundlegung* 5 (2000): 58.

<sup>47</sup> Konze 200.

<sup>48</sup> Monika Maron, “Zonophobie,” *Nach Maßgabe meiner Begreifungskraft: Artikel und Essays* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1993) 112-120. Maron also offers a more sympathetic view of her fellow Easterners in: “Writers and the People,” *New German Critique* 52 (1991): 36-41.

## Chapter Two

<sup>49</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) xv.

<sup>50</sup> See Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema 1949-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 6-7 for a discussion of the subversive potential of the notion of *Alltag* within the GDR, which shifted focus away from the Party’s progressive vision of history and towards the ahistorical experience of everyday life. On the loss of faith in the teleology of progress, in both the East and the West, see Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 1-9. Huyssen suggests that neither the end of the Cold War nor German unification have been able to sustain exuberant hopes for the future; the result of “the fading of a whole tradition of teleological philosophies of history” has been “the paradox that novelty in our culture is ever more associated with the past rather than with future expectation” (6). Similarly, in a discussion of artwork dedicated to the industrial remnants of socialist labor, Charity Scribner says that “The literature and art that recalls the socialist collective does not simply indulge in melancholia for an idealized communist or welfare state of the past. Rather, it heightens the awareness that something is missing from the present. State socialism’s ruin signaled that industrial modernity had exhausted its utopian potential” in: *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003) 3. Finally, Boym notes that “The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia” (xiv).

<sup>51</sup> Huyssen 7, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East: Film Culture, Unification, and the "New" Germany, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) 19.

<sup>53</sup> In an article on contemporary identity formation in the former GDR, Patricia Hogwood discusses this "identity of contrariness," or *Trotzidentität*, developed in hostile reaction to Western political, economic, and cultural hegemony in unified Germany. This attitude has earned some former East Germans the appellation "*Jammerossis*." See Patricia Hogwood, "After the GDR: Reconstructing Identity in Post-Communist Germany," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16.4 (2000): 58. For information on unemployment in the former East, particularly in the years immediately following unification, see Helga A. Welsh, Andreas Pickel, and Dorothy Rosenberg, "East and West German Identities: United and Divided?" *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Modern German Studies* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997) 115-117. Women in particular have suffered from high levels of unemployment, as well as underemployment as a result of the devaluation of university or professional degrees.

<sup>54</sup> Huyssen 40. Huyssen critiques "the failure of German intellectuals" in relation to discourses of German unification, claiming that their rhetoric and behavior "...lacked sovereignty, perspective, and compassion; it betrayed self-indulgence and arrogance, a fatal aloofness from reality and a desperate clinging to projections, and, when under fire, melancholic self-pity and unrepentant self-righteousness" (38). Huyssen relates that he was "appalled by the contempt so many left intellectuals showed for the East German desire for Western consumer goods, about the facile separation of the good revolutionary Leipzigers of the fall from the bad commodity fetishists and misguided nationalists of the spring" (40). This article originally appeared as: "After the Wall: The Failure of German Intellectuals," *New German Critique* 52 (1991): 109-143.

<sup>55</sup> In terms of this pop-culture revival of East German products, Martin Blum situates his discussion of *Ostalgie* in the discourses of material culture, describing how the cultural meanings of objects often extend beyond their production, marketing, or use. Blum refers to Jean Baudrillard's emphasis on a consumer product's "sign exchange value" (*valeur d'échange signe*): "Below their concrete visibility (*évidence*), needs and functions basically describe only an abstract level, a manifest discourse of objects, in regard to which the largely unconscious social discourse appears fundamental. An accurate theory of objects will not be established upon a theory of needs and their satisfaction, but upon a theory of social presentations and signification" (Baudrillard qtd. in Blum 233). On consumption studies' focus on the multiple dependencies between the consumer and the consumed object, Blum quotes Colin Campbell: "Possessions... have significance for their owners because of the part which they have played, or still play, in their life experiences" (Campbell qtd. in Blum 234). Of *Ostalgie*, Blum also suggests that the notoriously low quality of East German goods, as well as their utilitarian appearance, subvert the "slick and uniform surface of Western consumer culture" in the post unification context (242-43). In: Martin Blum, "Remaking the East German Past: *Ostalgie*, Identity, and Material Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34.3 (2000): 229-253.

<sup>56</sup> See Charity Scribner's description of the *Offenes Depot* at the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* in Eisenhüttenstadt and the *Kita-Museum*, dedicated to children's culture, in Oranienburg in: "Tender Rejection: The German Democratic Republic Goes to the Museum," *European Journal of English Studies* 4.2 (2000): 171-187. A version of this article is also reprinted in Scribner's monograph, *Requiem for Communism*, cited above.

<sup>57</sup> Huyssen 16.

<sup>58</sup> Huyssen suggests that museum pieces have a "temporal aura," which intensifies with an object's age. Furthermore, he says, "It may be precisely the isolation of the object from its genealogical context that permits the experience via the museal glance of reenchantment" (33).

<sup>59</sup> Boym 49. Boym attributes restorative nostalgia in particular to nationalist revivals and the desire to return to national symbols and myths. Though Alex's project is in no way *nationalist*, it nevertheless shares key traits with this more conservative form of nostalgia.

<sup>60</sup> Boym 57.

<sup>61</sup> Miriam Weber qtd. in Anna Funder, *Stasiland* (London: Granta Books, 2003) 275. Miriam Weber, together with her late husband Charlie, is a victim of *Stasi* brutality. Her story provided the impetus for Funder's work. Funder has criticized *Good Bye, Lenin!* for failing to address the *Stasi* issue in: "Berliner,"

rev. of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, by Wolfgang Becker, *Prospect* 24 July 2003, *Lexis Nexis*, 15 Aug. 2005, 26 April 2005 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>>.

<sup>62</sup> C.f. Huyssen's suggestion that the ambiguity of museum pieces ultimately resists dominant narratives: "No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory" (15).

<sup>63</sup> Huyssen 34. C.f. Boym's comments on collective memory: "Collective memory will be understood here as the common landmarks of everyday life. They constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollections. They are folds in the fan of memory, not prescriptions for a model tale... shared everyday frameworks of collective or cultural memory can offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives. These narratives have a certain syntax (as well as a common intonation), but no single plot" (53).

<sup>64</sup> Boym 55.

<sup>65</sup> C.f. Jähn's comment from the perspective of outer space: "Schon vor meinem Flug war mir bewusst, wie klein und verletzlich unser Planet ist. Aber erst als ich ihn vom Weltraum aus sah, in all seiner unglaublichen Schönheit und Zartheit, erkannte ich: Die dringendste Aufgabe der Menschheit besteht darin, für die Erde liebevoll zu sorgen und sie künftigen Generationen zu bewahren." Jähn qtd. in Christina Moles Kaupp, *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003) 21.

### Chapter Three

<sup>66</sup> Jana Hensel, *Zonenkinder* (2002; Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004) 14.

<sup>67</sup> Monika Maron, *Pawels Briefe: Eine Familiengeschichte* (1999; Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7.

<sup>69</sup> Florian Illies, *Generation Golf: Eine Inspektion* (Berlin: Argon, 2000). Illies's *Generation Golf* is a humorous celebration of the popular and material culture that marked the author's 1980s West German childhood. Illies describes the eighties as "eine gigantische Endloschleife," boring, but nevertheless pleasant: "Es ging allen gut, man hatte kaum noch Angst, und wenn man den Fernseher anmachte, sah man immer Helmut Kohl... Noch ahnte man nicht, daß man einer Generation angehörte, für die sich leider das ganze Leben, selbst an einem Montag, anfühlte wie die träge Bewegungslosigkeit eines gutgepolsterten Sonntagsnachmittags." (16) In the absence of a generational conflict or dramatic historical change, Illies defines his generation in terms of consumer culture trends: his and his peers' formative experiences rest on the pillars of Playmobile toys, IKEA, and the Volkswagen Golf. The events of 1989-1990 seem to have had no influence on Illies; in nearly 200 pages of text, he mentions East Germans exactly twice. In interviews, Hensel has indicated that Illies's omission of East Germany and the East Germans partly inspired *Zonenkinder*. See for instance: Manuela Thieme, "Adieu, Pittiplatsch," *Die Zonenkinder und Wir: Die Geschichte eines Phänomens*, ed. Tom Kraushaar (Hamburg: Rowohlt 2004) 48-49. Originally in: *Das Magazin*, Sept. 2002, as well as: "Die Normalität des Ausnahmezustands: Ein Gespräch mit Jana Hensel," Kraushaar 94.

<sup>70</sup> See Thomas Jung, foreword, *Alles nur Pop? Anmerkungen zur populären und Pop-Literatur seit 1990*, ed. Thomas Jung, Osloer Beiträge zur Germanistik Ser. 32 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002): "Die Autoren der jungen Generation- und zu reden ist von denen, die mit der Wende von 1990 ins Licht der Medien-Öffentlichkeit getreten sind- nehmen, wie manche ihrer modern-modernistischen Vorgänger, die Zerstückelung der Welt als Voraussetzung, zum Kern der Widersprüche, die die Gegenwart ausmachen, vorzudringen und diesselben für den Moment des Schreibens bzw. Lesens aufzuzeigen" (11). Jung also offers a detailed description of the language of pop literature (42).

<sup>71</sup> Hensel 18, 20, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Moritz Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman: Die neuen Archivisten* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002) 164-165. Baßler says of the similarities and differences between Brinkmann's style of pop literature and the genre's later manifestations: "...Formal entsteht durch die Verwendung der Warenweltvokabel so etwas wie frühe Pop-Literatur, inhaltlich ist die Warenwelt für Brinkmann aber genau das Gegenteil von Pop, nämlich Symptom wiederaufbaudeutscher Spießigkeit" (165). Baßler also points to Diedrich Diederichsen's differentiation between Pop I and Pop II: "Auf der einen Seite den der Sechziger bis Achtziger, wo Pop Gegenkultur, Widerstand, Dissidenz bedeutete, aber auch Affirmation, Warenförmigkeit, Flüchtigkeit. Und auf der anderen den der Neunziger, wo Pop als „Dummy-Term“ im Einsatz ist" (qtd. in Baßler 165).



<sup>73</sup> Moritz Baßler, "Die "Zonenkinder" und das "Wir": Ein Nachwort," Kraushaar 113. For instance, of his and his peers' supposed lack of interest in politics, Illies says: "Das Problem der Generation Golf ist dabei natürlich, daß sie sich tatsächlich mehr Gedanken macht über die Anzüge der Politiker als über deren Taten, politisch also völlig indifferent ist. Beziehungsweise: Das ist nicht das Problem der Generation Golf, sondern das Problem, das andere mit der Generation Golf haben" (121).

<sup>74</sup> See Jung: "Es ist dies eine Literatur, die sich um eine nahezu mimetische Nachbildung der modernen, besser postmodern fragmentarisierten, technokratischen, medial vermittelten Welt bemüht" (25).

<sup>75</sup> Jörg Magenau, "Literature as a Generation's Medium for Self-Understanding," *New German Critique* 88 (2003): 103.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Meinecke, "Ich als Text (Extended Version)," *Zuerst bin ich immer Leser: Prosa schreiben heute*, eds. Ute-Christine Krupp and Ulrike Janssen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000) 19.

<sup>77</sup> Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman*, 184.

<sup>78</sup> Jörgen Schäfer, "Neue Mitteilungen aus der Wirklichkeit." Zum Verhältnis von Pop und Literatur in Deutschland seit 1968, *Pop-Literatur*, eds. Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Jörgen Schäfer, Text + Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur. Sonderband (Munich: Richard Boorberg Verlag, 2003) 15-16. Schäfer offers an extended list of the discourse on pop literature (25).

<sup>79</sup> Hensel 26.

<sup>80</sup> Hensel 51.

<sup>81</sup> Illies 29.

<sup>82</sup> Hensel 60-61. Note too that Hensel's and Illies's descriptions of West German styles of dress in the mid-1990s are almost identical: in *Zonenkinder*, as Hensel describes her constant observation of her Western students, she writes: "Westfrauen bestachen in der Regel durch ihren legeren Umgang mit Markenklamotten, die sie in einer Geste des Unterstatements gern mit einem Teil aus dem Secondhand oder von H&M konterkarierten, so als wollten sie sich erben" (61). Similarly, Illies comments: "Stilvoll, das definierten wir ab Mitte der Neunziger als eine Form von Understatement" (145).

<sup>83</sup> Hensel 50.

<sup>84</sup> Hensel 48.

<sup>85</sup> Stefan Heym, "Ash Wednesday in the GDR," *New German Critique* 52 (1991): 31.

<sup>86</sup> Monika Maron, "Writers and the People," *New German Critique* 52 (1991): 37. Maron also suggests that Heym is not alone in this harsh critique of the East German population. C.f. note 6 in my discussion on Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*

<sup>87</sup> Maron, "Writers and the People," 38.

<sup>88</sup> Hensel 20-21.

<sup>89</sup> C.f. Baßler's critique of Illies, referenced in note 8 above.

<sup>90</sup> Hensel 63-64.

<sup>91</sup> Hensel 166.

<sup>92</sup> Hensel 132.

<sup>93</sup> Hensel 129.

<sup>94</sup> Hensel 70-71.

<sup>95</sup> Hensel 71.

<sup>96</sup> Baßler, "Die "Zonenkinder"," 116. Thomas Meinecke also refers to the move away from the subject in his own work: "Meine prophylaktische Arbeitshypothese bleibt: Das autonome Subjekt ist abgeschafft. Und mit ihm der Autor. Die meisten Zeitgenossen haben es ja ohnehin noch nicht einmal bemerkt. Geschweige denn: begriffen. Keine Spur im kollektiven Bewußtsein vom hybriden Subjekt, kein Common Sense über die Konstruiertheit jeglicher sogenannter Identität. Die progressive politische Arbeit unter dieser Voraussetzung hat gerade erst begonnen" (20-21).

<sup>97</sup> Volker Weidermann, "Glückskinder der späten Geburt," Kraushaar 14. Originally in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 8 Sept. 2002. See Kraushaar for various readers' responses (74-93).

<sup>98</sup> Baßler, "Die "Zonenkinder"," 113. See also Torsten Liesegang's critique of Illies: "Although Illies compiles a considerable number of elements typical of late seventies and eighties media and consumer culture, his attempt to portray a generation from his own experience fails because of the narrowing down of sociological, cultural, and political complexity to one perspective. As if there were no other experiences possible, as if there were nobody challenging his middle-class harmony and its delusive peacefulness, the text is written in an obtrusive "we" that presupposes the undisputed agreement of the reader..." : "New

German Pop Literature”: Difference, Identity, and the Redefinition of Pop Literature after Postmodernism,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 40.3 (2004): 269.

<sup>99</sup> Illies 197. Note that this caveat comes on the last page of the book.

<sup>100</sup> Hensel 75, 80.

<sup>101</sup> Hensel 80.

<sup>102</sup> Hensel 51.

<sup>103</sup> Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman*.

<sup>104</sup> Nora 13.

<sup>105</sup> Magenau 99.

<sup>106</sup> Iris Radisch qtd. in Thomas Jung, “Vom Pop international zu Tristesse Royal. Die Popliteratur, der Kommerz und die postmoderne Beliebtheit,” in Jung 42.

<sup>107</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 7.

<sup>108</sup> Nora 19.

<sup>109</sup> Hensel 14.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Cammann, “Auf der Suche nach dem DDR-Gefühl,” Kraushaar 64. Originally in: *Vorgänge*, Jan. 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Hensel 76.

<sup>112</sup> “Die Normalität des Ausnahmezustands,” Kraushaar 95.

<sup>113</sup> Hensel 113-116. C.f. Cammann’s comments: “Oft genug reduziert sie das Kindsein im Osten auf die Erinnerung an ihre alljährliche Aufregung in der Nacht auf den 13. Dezember, den Pioniergeburtstag. So östlich wie bei Hensel war der Osten zu DDR-Zeiten nie. Erstaunlich ist auch die eigentümliche Sterilität des Buches: Zwar ist andauernd von den Produkten, Orten und Erlebnissen einer Kindheit in der DDR die Rede, doch es entsteht kein Zusammenhang; alles wird hintereinanderweg kurz angerissen. Diese andere Kindheit bleibt seltsam geruchlos, ohne Intensität.” in Kraushaar 64-65.

<sup>114</sup> “Die Normalität des Ausnahmezustands,” Kraushaar 99. C.f. her description of her parents’ patterns of consumption referenced above: “Die schöne, bunte Warenwelt konnte manche überfordern...” Hensel 48.

<sup>115</sup> Huyssen 34. See also note 3 in my discussion of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, and Huyssen’s assertion that the contemporary obsession with memory “represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload” (7).

#### Chapter Four

<sup>116</sup> In terms of Sonnenallee’s authorship, the original conception for the film came from Thomas Brussig; Brussig and Haußmann then worked together to write the film’s screenplay. Haußmann made the film, and Brussig wrote a literary adaptation that differs somewhat from the final film version.

<sup>117</sup> Wendy Everett, “Singing our song: music, memory and myth in contemporary European cinema,” *100 years of European cinema: Entertainment or ideology?*, eds. Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 175.

<sup>118</sup> Patricia Hogwood, “After the GDR: Reconstructing Identity in Post-Communist Germany,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16.4 (2000): 55.

<sup>119</sup> Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema 1949-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 9.

<sup>120</sup> Feinstein 10. Feinstein refers here to the following works: Ina Merkel, “Konsumkultur in der DDR: Über das Scheitern der Gegenmode auf dem Schlachtfeld des Konsums,” *Mitteilungen aus der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung* 37 (February 1996): 314-30 and Michael Rauhaut, *Beat in der Grauzone: DDR-Rock 1964 bis 1972- Politik und Alltag* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1993).

<sup>121</sup> See Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 82 for a brief description of Horkheimer’s and, above all, Adorno’s views on popular music. In *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 10, Uta Poiger says in her discussion of 1950s youth cultures that though Jost Hermand has argued that in West Germany, rock and roll was considered rebellious for the

younger generation, “he has used the Marxist idea of negative cooperation to conclude that this image of rebellion channeled the dissatisfaction of the lower classes, and their potential political resistance, into the arena of compensatory entertainment.” Poiger refers to: Jost Hermand, *Kultur in Wiederaufbau: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1965* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1986).

<sup>122</sup> Jonathan S. Epstein, introduction, *Adolescents and Their Music: If It's Too Loud, You're Too Old*, ed. Jonathan S. Epstein (New York: Garland, 1994) xx.

<sup>123</sup> Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 57.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Wicke, “Pop Music in the GDR between Conformity and Resistance,” *Changing Identities in East Germany: Selected Papers from the Nineteenth and Twentieth New Hampshire Symposia (1993 and 1994)*, Studies in GDR Culture and Society 14/15, eds. Margy Gerber and Roger Woods (Lanham: UP of America, 1996) 33. For more on rock music in the GDR, see: Peter Wicke, “The Times They Are A-Changin’: Rock Music and Political Change in East Germany,” *Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Boston: South End, 1994) 81-92 and Olaf Leitner, “Rock Music in the GDR: An Epitaph,” *Rocking the State: rock music and politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Boulder: Westview, 1994) 17-40.

<sup>125</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 6. For more on film music, see: Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film* (1947; Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1969), Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), as well as Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, cited above.

<sup>126</sup> Gorbman 20.

<sup>127</sup> Everett 176.

<sup>128</sup> Everett 172-84.

<sup>129</sup> Everett 176.

<sup>130</sup> Wicke, “The Times” 82.

<sup>131</sup> Everett 178.

<sup>132</sup> Paul Cooke, “Performing ‘Ostalgie’: Leander Haussmann’s *Sonnenallee*,” *German Life and Letters* 56:2 (2003): 164.

<sup>133</sup> *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* launched the Puhdys’ popularity; however, it must be remembered that the Puhdys were hardly the rebels of the East German rock scene. Compared to a band like, for example, the Renft Combo, who were told by cultural functionaries in 1975 when they went to have their performance license renewed that they simply did not exist anymore, the Puhdys were the darlings of the state. Contrasting the fate of his own group to the Puhdys’ officially sanctioned success, Klaus Renft has remarked: “I mean, we didn’t all get huge villas on the Müggelsee like the Puhdys...” (Renft qtd. in: Anna Funder, *Stasiland* (London: Granta Books, 2003) 192.) Haußmann’s decision to foreground the Puhdys of all bands is therefore an ironic gesture towards the supposed rebelliousness of both East German popular music and its fans.

<sup>134</sup> Carow qtd. in Andrea Rinke, “Sex and subversion in German Democratic Republic cinema: *The Legend of Paul and Paula* (1973),” *100 years of European cinema: Entertainment or ideology?*, eds. Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 53.

<sup>135</sup> Qtd. in Cafferty 253.

<sup>136</sup> The story of Micha’s parents, Doris and Hotte, follows a similar trajectory: in the beginning of the film, Doris finds the passport of a 68-year-old West German woman, which she plans to use to cross the border into the West. At the last minute, however, she loses her nerve standing in line at the checkpoint, and a West German behind her calls out: “Wir wollen auch nicht vergammeln in der Zone.” Cafferty comments: “Turning back, she takes this as a provocation “nicht zu vergammeln in der Zone” and seduces Hotte in a reaffirmation of her love for him” 261.

<sup>137</sup> See Introduction, note 1.

<sup>138</sup> See Feinstein 211-213 for an overview of official and popular reaction to *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*.

<sup>139</sup> Cooke 161.

<sup>140</sup> German media especially focused on prominent East German intellectuals’, artists’, and politicians’ various levels of collaboration with the *Stasi*, as for instance in the debates surrounding Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Manfred Stolpe. See, for example, the brief discussions by the following authors: Helga A. Welsh, Andreas Pickel, and Dorothy Rosenberg, “East and West German Identities: United and

Divided?" *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Modern German Studies* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997) 122; Konrad H. Jarausch, Hinrich C. Seeba, and David P. Conradt, "The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany," *After Unity* 52-53; and Peter Monteath and Reinhard Alter, introduction, *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, eds. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997) 17-18. Monteath and Alter quote Stolpe as noting that the *Stasi* debate showed "in how short a time it was forgotten what the conditions of a dictatorship were" 18. That *Sonnenallee* takes a more differentiated view of the *Stasi* issue is shown through the character of Mario, who, after being kicked out of school, must become a collaborator in order to get a job. Mario's acquiescence leads to a break with Micha, arguably the film's one truly tragic moment.

<sup>141</sup> Here is not the place to discuss this comment's implicit assumptions about life in Africa.

<sup>142</sup> Nina Hagen's mother, the actress Eva-Maria Hagen, lived with the dissident singer/songwriter Wolf Biermann in the 1960s. When Biermann was expatriated during a concert in Cologne in 1976, Hagen and her mother followed him into the West. "Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen" was her first hit. See Leitner 31.

<sup>143</sup> C.f. Feinstein's discussion of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, 211: "In other words, to the extent that Carow and Plenzdorf's film encouraged audiences to see their own lives differently in light of Paul and Paula's fictional experience, the guiding utopian vision being proffered was an explicitly private one, at best marginal to the goals and practices of state ideology."

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Brussig, *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (1999; Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002) 156-57.

<sup>145</sup> Qtd. in Cafferty 256.

<sup>146</sup> "Sonnenallee: Interview mit Thomas Brussig und Leander Haußmann," by Sandra Maischberger, *Thomas Brussig*, 29 January 2005 <<http://www.thomasbrussig.ed/interviews/sonnenallee.htm>>.

<sup>147</sup> Feinstein 196.

## Conclusion

<sup>148</sup> See for instance Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 129-150.

<sup>149</sup> Mary Fulbrook, "Reckoning with the Past: Heroes, Victims, and Villains in the History of the German Democratic Republic," *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, eds. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997) 188. In her discussion of contemporary museums to everyday life in the GDR, Charity Scribner indicates that curators tend to omit representations of citizens' involvement in the state apparatus: "After all, these GDR museums concentrate on the private and the domestic, the realm of what East Germans called 'niche culture'. They assert that private lives were indeed led under communism, despite the state's attempts to deny individual indulgences. But the museum's emphasis on niche culture comes over and against the documentation of larger, state-sanctioned practices. In general, these GDR exhibitions do not encompass residues of state-organized events or represent many of the customs which once engaged citizens as a mass, such as those recorded in the *Stasi* archives. What would be the implications of an exhibition which aimed to manifest the patterns of identification which connected the private to the monumental, the personal to the political in the GDR past?" In: "Tender Rejection: The German Democratic Republic Goes to the Museum," *European Journal of English Studies* 4.2 (2000): 185.

<sup>150</sup> David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 200. The story Bathrick refers to originally appeared in: *Der Spiegel*, 26 March 1990.

<sup>151</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 87, 88.

<sup>152</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 19.

<sup>153</sup> Moritz Baßler, *Der deutsche Pop-Roman: Die neuen Archivisten* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002) 15.

<sup>154</sup> Monika Maron, *Stille Zeile Sechs* (1991; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2003) 156.

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